

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY

1984

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A New Mike Shayne Thriller

DEAD RINGER
by Brett Halliday

Suspenseful
Short Stories
by Masters of
Mystery Fiction



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for the next
set of Oscars."**

-Gary Arnold
WASHINGTON POST



The robbery should have taken 10 minutes. 4 hours later, the bank was like a circus sideshow. 8 hours later, it was the hottest thing on live T. V. 12 hours later, it was all history. And it's all true.



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MIKE SHAYNE

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DEAD RINGER

by Brett Halliday

Somebody was impersonating Mike Shayne, and doing too good a job of it, and the big redheaded Miami detective was madder than hell. He wanted to know why. The answer to that question led him along a twisted trail of violence that threatened to silence him once and for all! 4

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Shayne's right eye caught a fleeting glimpse of movement. Instinctively, he pushed out hard, sprawling his secretary toward the wall. Then his own body was rolling behind her desk. His right hand sped to the small of his back, grasped the familiar steel of the Smith & Wesson Army Special, and brought the .38 up quickly. Just as quickly a bullet crashed into the wall over his head. Had he not moved, the slug would have taken them both out!

Dead Ringer

by BRETT HALLIDAY

LADY BRETT DREW DEEPLY ON THE SILVER CIGARETTE holder that her daddy had given her and exhaled sharply. Men were such bastards. You couldn't trust them to do anything. She looked over the ornate balustrade at the party that swirled below her. Her creation. Hadn't she called the caterers? Hadn't she picked out the decor? Hadn't she made up the guest list to include anyone who could be helpful to Jake's career, to *them*? And what would she get for it? A little peck on the cheek and Jake's usual drunken boast that "his little darling" was the power behind the power.

Well, *in vino veritas* or at least half-truths. She could be the power behind what the American country songs called "her man." Perhaps it was time to give dear, sweet Jake a little demonstration of her potential.

She surveyed the party through her half-filled champagne glass. God, they were all such bores. How long had it been since she had had a real man? College? That was twenty years ago. She threw her blonde hair back over her shoulders. They had swarmed about her then like flies. She grimaced at her own conceit.

Down below, the usual big talkers-little doers broke into their familiar dull cliques. A city councilman, a player for the Miami Dolphins, a Cuban exile, their C.P.A., even the guy who cleaned their pool. Why couldn't Jake at least have been a snob? That would have given her something to hate him for. No, poor Jake had one talent in life, and that was boring her to death.

A tall man with red hair and a tux that looked like it was created for him caught her attention. Instead of the Dom Perignon, he seemed to be drinking out of a brandy snifter. Clinging to a muscular arm was a shorter brunette, who periodically leaned over and said something into his ear that made him smile. As he walked across the room, he seemed a latter-day Moses. The waves of company parted to let him through, and if she hadn't had so much to drink, she would have sworn she saw one or two women actually drool as he passed by. How could she blame them. The man was a hunk, and at a gathering of wimps he stood out like an eagle in a sparrow's nest.

She called Nestor up the stairs. The major domo came to attention, doing everything but clicking his heels in front of her.

"Nestor," she said, "the mousey little thing down there in the black, lowcut dress that looks like it came off the racks. Who is she?"

"I believe, Mrs. Barnes, the lady in question was introduced as Miss Lucy Hamilton."

"And that man with her?"

"That gentleman is Mr. Michael Shayne, a private investigator."

"Well," she said, a strange feeling gripping her stomach, "I made up the guest list myself, and I do not recall either name. Therefore, they must be gate-crashers. Get rid of them immediately. No, on second thought, I'll do it myself."

"Very well, madame, but I'm quite certain that Mister Barnes invited them at the last moment."

"Oh." She was curious now, but tried not to show it. "Do you have any idea why?"

"If Mr. Barnes had confided in me, madame, I would not be at liberty to tell you."

"Don't be insolent, Nestor. Just because you were with Mr. Barnes' family is no reason to treat me as an outsider."

"Will there be anything else, madame? I must return to my post at

the door."

"Go to hell, Nestor."

"That would be . . ."

"Shut up." She would have done something about him, but she had noticed Jake walking up to the intruders, introducing himself, and then taking them into his private study. She could tell by the way he noisily closed the doors he wanted to be alone.

What was dear Jake up to now? The study was his designated room of business, and of course these gatherings were nothing more than vehicles to bring two parties together, Jake and those he wanted to deal with. Of course there were other people invited purely for credibility and respectability. Jake thought of himself as a packager, a middle man between certain ideas and lots of money. The redhaired man was too . . . physical—yes, that was the word she was seeking. She put down the champagne glass hard, spilling the Dom Perignon over the new gold carpeting that had cost \$52 a square yard. It had suddenly struck her that this deal might be something personal, not business after all. But a man and a woman? Somebody new? What was going on?

SHE DESCENDED THE STAIRS RAPIDLY, NOT EVEN PAUSING to respond to a question from Pearl, who was reported to be her best friend. As she passed an Oriental mirror, she saw from the angle how the makeup had caked in one of those creases that were constantly appearing under her eyes. She'd consult with Dr. Blake tomorrow about another nip and tuck in her rebuilt physiognomy.

The oak doors to Jake's study were closed tighter than most of their guests' wallets, and the usual bad jokes and drunken laughter hindered her listening even further. Still, at times Jake was almost yelling. That meant he was angry, very angry about something. What had he discovered? Even if she had owed her entire soul to Worth Avenue, that wouldn't have bothered him. And she was sure he didn't know about her last amour. Phillipé was very tight-lipped about his "conquests," but that had been so long ago she had already forgotten what she had bought him as a farewell gift.

" . . . threatened to kill me . . ."

Her heart raced. Lady Brett was certain she had heard the word "kill" through the door, and certain too it was used in the passive. Of course Jake couldn't kill anybody. She put her ear to the crack discreetly.

"If you are so tired you must lean against the door, I'll be glad to

escort you upstairs," said the suddenly appearing Nestor.

"Go take a flying leap off a high balcony, you bastard," she said.

She just knew, though his back was to her, that he had that insufferable smile pasted across his face as he walked away.

"... want you to take care of . . ."

So Jake was hiring this couple to take care of somebody. Lady Brett wondered just how much "take care" meant. Was it a euphemism for something violent? And who was this mysterious woman?

"... she's definitely in the way, so do it immediately . . ."

A woman. A woman and Jake. Of all the things she had never expected of her husband. But an affair? Jake? Dear, constant Jake. Was the redhaired man some kind of assassin—hit man, she had heard them called in an American movie once.

Well, this business had gone quite far enough. She knew Jake couldn't be trusted to think for himself, to try to operate without her guidance. He could blow the entire operation, in one foolish moment wipe out what they had all striven so long for. Of course Jake would have to be disciplined for bringing an outsider into the setup for the first time.

As the band at the far end of the ballroom struck up "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," she saw clearly—she knew exactly what she had to do.

II

HE HAD BEEN IN TOUGHER SPOTS BEFORE, THE REDHEAD knew, and he wished this were one of them. Sweat erupted all over his body even though the air conditioning was on full blast, and he had a dizzying feeling.

"Mike Shayne," snapped his beautiful secretary, "the least you can do is pay attention to me when I'm trying to tell you something important. Don't I listen to every word about one of your cases?"

Lucy had him there. "Go on," he apologized. "I'm all ears."

"How nice," she said impishly. "Usually you're all hands."

She jumped up from the desk, and his playful swat passed harmlessly into the office air. Before he could recover she was sitting in his lap and starting to nuzzle his ear.

"Why, Miss Hamilton," he said with mock sternness, "what would happen if a client should walk in at this very moment?"

"They'd have their usual suspicions confirmed. Isn't a private detective supposed to play around with his startlingly attractive, buxom, and highly perceptive secretary?"

"Well," he answered, "two out of three ain't bad."

She stood up and placed her hands on her hips. "Which two, mister?"

Shayne broke into his uproarious Irish laugh. It had been a long time since he and Lucy had been able to relax. The cases had pushed against him back to back like books on an overcrowded shelf.

Lucy broke the mood. "As much as I like playing around with the boss, I still want to show you this new contraption you invested almost three thousand dollars in."

"Three thousand dollars," said the redhead sitting up. "This new typewriter costs three thousand dollars?"

"This is not just a typewriter, Mr. Behind-the-Times. This is a new Apple IIe complete with a monitor, two disk drives, and a letter-quality printer. Do you know how much time and effort this machine will save me? Why I'll be able to store all our files on disks. We won't need those cumbersome metal file cabinets in your office any longer."

Shayne rasped his left thumbnail across the red stubble on his chin. "Then, you tell me, Miss Know-It-All, where am I going to keep my Martell?"

Immediately she kissed him full on the lips. As he felt her soft, warm body melt into his, his ears picked up another sensation.

The door into the outer office was opening slowly. Through some errant brown hairs, his right eye caught a fleeting glimpse of movement. Instinctively he pushed out hard, sprawling Lucy toward the wall. He never saw her hit. His body was rolling behind her desk. His right hand sped to the small of his back, grasped the familiar steel of the Smith & Wesson Army Special, and brought the .38 up quickly. Just as he started to fire, his eye caught something else. The attacker was dropping the weapon. As it thudded to the wooden floor, he heard Lucy's scream, and then an outcry from the attacker. It was a woman. She was standing there in a black cocktail dress at noontime, her hands trembling, and she was crying.

The rangy redhead put away his weapon. He could see her blue eyes were bloodshot, as though she had been crying or perhaps up all night. Maybe both. She dropped to one knee. Shayne could see that she was older. Just below her ears, his trained eye caught the ever-so-small scar. Plastic surgery. He guessed her in her forties. From the black roots he decided she had tried to fight the advancing years and was losing.

Shayne and his secretary reached the trembling figure at the same moment. The redhead marvelled at what was happening. A few seconds earlier this woman had tried to kill them both, had interrupted one of his most pleasant moments, and now they were helping her.

They gently placed her on the couch that Shayne had been swearing

to get upholstered for over three years.

"She's fainted," said Lucy. "I'll get her some water."

"Some of your famous Louisiana coffee'll help her more."

"Michael," said his secretary, leaning against him, "what happened?"

"I don't know, Angel, but I'm sure as hell going to find out."

WITHIN HALF AN HOUR THE MYSTERIOUS BLONDE WAS starting to awaken. Shayne had spent most of the time assuring the adjoining offices that what they had heard was only a car backfiring. A pencil stuck in an outside wall contradicted him.

"Mrs. Barnes," he said, watching her eyelids flutter, "do you think now you can tell us what this is all about?"

Her eyes darted around the room like a caged animal's and she started to shake again. "How," she demanded, "did you know who I am?"

"While you were out," replied his secretary, "Michael went through your purse and found your driver's license."

"You're Mike Shayne?" she said.

"Who did you think you were shooting at?" he said.

"You . . . but wait a minute. Where are the police? Isn't it customary to call them at a time like this?"

"When I went down the hall to explain your shots, I called the address I had found on your driver's license. A man answered," Shayne began.

"Jake?"

"If he's your husband," Miami's best-known investigator answered. "He begged me not to call the cops. He said he'd be right over and explain everything."

"Oh, my God," she said. "Something's wrong, dreadfully wrong, and I think I botched it all up. Won't you please call my husband back and tell him it's all been some kind of mistake?"

At that moment the door labelled MICHAEL SHAYNE, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR opened and in walked a tall figure about her age. "It's too late for that, my dear. I'm already here." Then he turned to look at Shayne. "But who is that man?" he said.

III

SHAYNE STUDIED THE VISITOR. HE WAS WEARING A tailored, white-linen suit. His face had a deep, dark tan that also looked tailor-made, built layer by layer by lounging around a club pool, sipping exotic cocktails, and rotating every half hour. His thin hand

clutched a leather briefcase that was also the color of money.

"Brett," said the intruder authoritatively, "Maxwell is waiting downstairs with the car." He looked disdainfully around the Flagler Street office. "You'd better hurry. He's a bit worried about the well-being of the Bentley in this neighborhood."

"He's got a point," said Shayne, looking to where the pencil protruded from the plaster. "You never know when some criminal type is going to wander in and start shooting up the place."

The visitor opened the door, ushered the still-trembling woman out, and turned to the redhead. "Now, my good man, I admit you do look exactly like him, but what are you doing in Michael Shayne's office?"

"Let's get something straight right off the bat, pal," said the big detective, firing up the familiar Camel. "I *am* Mike Shayne. What the hell are you talking about?"

The tanned man slammed the briefcase down hard on the desk in front of the still-shaken Lucy. "You are not Michael Shayne. A friend recommended him, and I called this number yesterday afternoon. He was good enough to come out last night to my house on the beach."

"What is he talking about, Michael?" said Shayne's confused secretary. "You spent the entire . . . we were together at my apartment last night."

"Your sleeping habits," said the visitor, "I assure you, do not interest me in . . ."

"What number did you dial yesterday, pal?" said the angered redhead.

"The one in the phonebook, of course."

Shayne shoved the phone toward his face like a large, black fist. "Is that the number you called?"

"Why yes, but . . ."

Shayne jerked out his wallet and showed both his P.I. and driver's license. "Do these tell you anything, pal?"

"Well . . ."

"I was just sitting here this morning," continued the redhead, "and this crazy woman comes in shooting first and not bothering to ask questions. I didn't know you were coming. Hell, you didn't know you were coming until I called you a little while ago. So, why, if I'm not Mike Shayne, am I in his office?"

The white-linen shoulders slumped, and the figure collapsed in the tattered and lumpy couch. "If you're Michael Shayne," he managed after a long pause, "then who was the man who came to my party last night?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said Shayne. Sure, there were times

when he would have loved to have had someone to take his place, to face the strongarms of Dominic Ferrari, the Oriental animalism of Ho Lu, the steel slugs, the death mask worn by a twelve-year-old junkie, but this was different. Someone was masquerading as him, and the redhead didn't like it. Somebody was messing around with the only thing a man in his profession truly had—a reputation. "Tell me," he said, "tell me about this other Mike Shayne."

"He had red hair, was almost as tall as you are. He had a smoother complexion. His hands weren't calloused and . . . gnarled. Wore his tux like it was custom-made for him."

"That should have clued you in," said Lucy, glancing at the rangy redhead's rumpled sports jacket. "Michael wouldn't be caught dead in something that fit."

"And," continued the sitting figure, "he had this mousey brunette who looked at him as though he were a god descended to earth."

"That sounds like Lucy Hamilton," Shayne said with a straight face. Then, turning serious, he asked, "Why did you want Mike Shayne?"

"My life has been threatened twice. I wanted him to find the woman."

"A woman threatened you twice," repeated the redhead.

"To kill me. The first time she walked into the V.I.P. Lounge at Miami International. God, knows how she got in, and she looked me straight in the eye and said, 'You're a dead man'."

"And the second?"

"Some friends and I were having lunch at the Buccaneer Hotel. I got a page. When I picked up the phone, she stuck something in my back and told me she could have done it there except that she wanted me to sweat. When I turned around, I saw the elevator doors closing on the same dark-haired girl who was at the airport."

"Did you call the police?" pursued the redhead.

"What could I have told them? Some young woman I didn't know had threatened to kill me for some unknown reason. Rot! They wouldn't even bother to finish filling out the complaint."

"So you went private?"

"You do have a reputation around Miami for being efficient, effective, and highly discreet. And my business depends upon the latter."

"What is your line of work?" interjected Lucy.

"Let's just say that I bring people of similar interests together."

Put off by the obvious evasiveness, Shayne spat out through his own smokescreen, "So do pimps."

"First of all, what I do isn't germane. Second, unless my relationship

with my clients remains confidential, I stand to lose a very lucrative enterprise."

For a moment the big redhead decided to accept his censored explanation and to change tack. "If Mike Shayne is supposed to be working for you, why in hell did your wife come in here and try to blow his brains out?"

"To be honest, I just don't know. Things have been a bit strained between Brett and me. We have had a few problems in the past, but why she would resort to violence is beyond me. Why just last night she was in her glory at a little get-together I had for some clients."

"The same party Mike Shayne showed up at in a tux?"

"Yes."

"Did she talk with him?"

"I doubt it. In fact, I'm fairly certain that other than the major domo I'm the only one there who spoke with him all evening."

"Could she had overheard your conversation?"

"I guess it's possible." He removed a monogrammed handkerchief and wiped his brow. "Mr. Shayne, I think I want to hire you."

"To find the woman."

"Yes, and the bogus detective."

The redhead stubbed out his cigarette. He didn't have the slightest interest in looking for an alleged threatener. Most threats he had found turned out to be meaningless anyway. But the impostor—that was another story. "I don't know," he said, thinking aloud, "about working for a client who has a trigger-happy wife."

"I assure you, Mr. Shayne, Brett will cause you no further problem."

The big detective said, "I don't come cheap."

Without a word the linen-suit unclasped his briefcase and lifted the cover.

The color of money indeed, thought Shayne. The leather case was completely filled with neatly banded stacks of one-hundred-dollar bills.

IV

"I BELIEVE," SAID THE MAN, "THIS SHOULD COVER WHAT I owe you—both for what my wife did to your office and for a retainer."

"Michael," exclaimed Lucy.

"What about the second day?" Shayne quipped.

The new client handed Shayne a business card. "When you have something, anything, contact me. In fact, I would like a daily report on your progress."

The redhead picked up a packet and peeled off ten perfectly new bills. He closed the briefcase and shoved it toward Barnes. "Pay me the rest when I deliver."

After the tall, tanned man had left, Lucy sat down at her desk and looked at Shayne. "Michael, that money would have paid for the new computer."

"That money could have made you a majority stockholder in a computer company. There must have been close to a million dollars."

"What kind of man has a million dollars lying around the house, much less carries it around with him?"

"Angel, the rich are very different from you and me."

"Why do you think somebody would impersonate you?" said Lucy. "To get his hands on that kind of money?"

"Maybe, but what really bothers me is how this phony accomplished the impersonation."

"What do you mean?"

"Barnes said he called this number yesterday. You were here all day. Do you remember his call?"

"Of course not. I would have told you."

"But somebody did call. Barnes talked to a Mike Shayne at this number and set up last night's meeting. How?"

"Michael," she said, suddenly sitting up, "now that you mention it, I got a phone call about 3:30. A man said no more than two words when we were cut off. When he didn't call back, I thought the call must not be important. Besides, with the phone company having so many problems lately, it happens all the time."

Shayne settled his rangy frame into the chair across from her and propped his size twelves on the desk. "A simple tap wouldn't be enough. We're dealing with some sort of interruptor. A device like that can be attached only at one end of the line or the other."

"Which end?"

Shayne jumped up. The odds were 50-50.

THE RAWBONED REDHEAD HADN'T BEEN IN THE FIRST-floor storage area since Lucy had convinced him to retire the overstuffed chair that was a companion piece to his favorite couch. Shayne twisted the doorknob. It was locked. Quickly he picked the lock and slowly pushed open the heavy metal door.

Stale air leapt at him out of the dark, but he was hesitant to flip on the light. If somebody had been inside yesterday afternoon, they might be there today. While he waited for his eyes to adjust to the near-total

darkness, he slipped off his loafers. Walking close to the wall and noiselessly as his martial arts sensei, Greg Chen, had taught him, the tall investigator approached the door that he vaguely remembered opened into a janitor's closet that housed the telephone connections for the entire building.

Without making a sound he put his ear to the door. Inside he faintly detected top forty music. There was something else. Voices.

He couldn't distinguish how many or what they were saying. Just a faint buzz. Unless some of the building's janitors had crept away for a clandestine crapshoot, the room should have been empty.

Silently and carefully he cracked the door. Fluorescent light illuminated the room. From his vantage point he could see only the back of one man. He was wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows and a one-ear headset.

A deep voice from somebody he couldn't see said, "Any important calls?"

"No," answered the white shirt, "not unless you count one from a radio station offering an all-expense-paid trip to Toledo just for knowing the secret word." He laughed. "Some woman wanted a gumshoe to follow her husband and his secretary to the Sleepytyme Motel and play candid camera for their latest business lunch."

"I'll bet a dick like Shayne makes extra copies of all those pics for himself," smirked the hidden man.

"I'll be happy when we wrap this op up tonight and get out of this hole. I got a hot tip on a longshot."

"No problem. Shayne's office will be closing any time for lunch and we can take a break for awhile."

"You think this tap'll pay dividends, Swift?"

"Who knows?"

"When I switched that call yesterday, what was it all about? Why have we got somebody playing Shayne?"

"Need to know, Roberts, and you don't. You just keep your ear tuned in and divert any calls from the big enchilada to the number we gave you?"

"What the hell. I've had worse assignments, but between you and me, I sure would like to meet Shayne's secretary. I can almost smell the magnolia blossoms when she answers the phone. Bet she's a looker."

"She is. How she ever got mixed up with an asshole like Shayne is beyond me."

Having heard enough, the big redhead shoved open the door.

Roberts jerked around, yanking the headset off. "Who the hell are

you?"

Shayne growled, "Just call me, Mr. Asshole."

Swift reached for a shoulder rig. "I knew we should have bugged his office too."

"But that would have ruined my little surprise party, guys." The big detective grabbed Swift's arm and jerked it out of his coat. A revolver flew to the floor. "This party doesn't need a popgun."

Swift shoved Shayne into the still-seated Roberts and took off. Grabbing a low-hanging water pipe, the redhead caught himself and bolted after the fleeing man. As Swift reached the outer room, the big detective launched himself as though he were the last man capable of preventing a touchdown.

Swift's knees buckled. They rolled across the cold, hard concrete, boxes tumbling and cleaning fluid spilling. They grappled, but Swift freed himself. Clutching a broom, he swung it like a baseball bat. Shayne ducked. As he backed up, he grabbed a mop, wishing he had paid more attention when Greg Chen had tried to show him the rudiments of the bo staff.

Fortunately he had learned enough to parry Swift's next blow. As the broomstick glanced off harmlessly into the dimly lit room, Shayne thrust the broom handle into the man's gut.

"Ooomph," gasped the antagonist.

The redhead never saw the metal pail, but as he advanced toward a bent-over Swift, Roberts clobbered him from behind. Shayne pitched forward as the pail caromed off his wide shoulders.

Shayne rolled forward, giving with the blow. Swift stopped his awkward advance with a strong kick to the ribs. The handle descended toward the redhead's face.

Shayne crossed his hands in an X block. The stick snapped across his rock-hard wrists. Shayne's right fist shot forward with the power of a piston.

Swift grabbed his groin and screamed in pain, his mouth trying to form obscenities that emerged as gibberish.

The redhead relieved his pain with a combination to the exposed face.

Roberts, a smaller man than Swift, stood there holding the pail like a farmboy reluctant to milk the cow. Suddenly he hurled the pail and broke for the door.

Shayne ducked and charging forward he lowered his shoulder. Just as Roberts reached the door to the outside the big detective caught him in the small of the back, driving him into the concrete wall.

As suddenly as it had begun, it was finished. Shayne rolled Roberts over. He had no wallet, no I.D. In fact, the only identifying marker at all was a slip of paper in his shirt that read 577-2919.

His search of Swift surprised the redhead. In his wallet was a photo I.D. showing that Gordon was not some strongarm for the mob, but a special agent for the Drug Enforcement Administration.

WILL GENTRY ALMOST SWALLOWED HIS CONTRABAND Havana. "You did what?"

"I didn't really have a choice. They didn't exactly identify themselves, and you don't expect to find two loyal sons of Uncle Sam in a storage room."

"Why is it, old friend, that I think that their identifying themselves wouldn't have made much difference?"

"Hey, how would you like somebody tapping your phone and making derogatory comments about your anatomy?"

The burly police chief rose and sucked in his stomach. "It happens every day, but I don't punch out the mayor. Tell me, do you feel any better for it?"

"Damn straight. Somebody's got to pay for tapping my phone. I'm no government risk." He picked up the decanter, poured the thick black fluid into the pitted styrofoam cup, and looked for some sugar. "You got a dip-stick for this 30-weight?"

Gentry laughed as he passed the redhead a plastic spoon.

"Will," said Shayne after a sip, "what do you know about the DEA?"

The big cop settled back in his chair. "About a decade ago, when war on everything but underdeveloped Southeast Asian countries was fashionable, the Feds decided to reorganized. At that time they had four agencies trying unsuccessfully to plug the constant holes in the drug dike."

"Typical bureaucratic logic," said Shayne. "One agency can do what four couldn't."

Gentry smiled at his friend's usual cynicism toward the government. "Could have been worse. They might have made it a cabinet position. Anyway, the DEA is supposed to reduce the supply of illicit drugs produced in this country and those illegally imported."

"Do they usually get their kicks hiding in storage rooms and tapping the phones of struggling private investigators? Hell, the strongest drug I ever took was Extra-Strength Excedrin."

"These are the top narcs. They only go after the tonnage. Drugs are a \$100 billion-a-year business. Just to put that in perspective, that's over

three times the size of IBM."

"What's their usual M.O.?"

"Undercover. They do a lot of things the Metro Dade Organized Crime Bureau does, but on a larger scale."

"The 'buy-bust' game."

"Exactly. They infiltrate an agent, set up a buy, and move in for the kill when it goes down. Just last year in the Big Apple, they scored six million in one bust. Even at that though, the estimate is they stop only ten percent of the traffic. And the marijuana dealers they catch—well, most of them jump bail. Those convicted get only a three-and-one-half year sentence, and most of those are paroled in fifteen months."

"Are you trying to tell me crime pays?"

"As long as we've got clowns willing to shell out big bucks for smuggled goods," he said, flicking his Havana, "it'll be a going concern."

"How much did you pay for that cigar, Will?"

Slowly Gentry stubbed out the half-smoked stogie, then sheepishly dropped it in his trashcan.

"What I keep coming back to," said the big detective, his Irish temper well above lukewarm, "is, why me?"

"Drop it, Mike. You don't want to know. Let me explain something else to you. Because there's been such a public hue and cry in this country for something to be done about drugs, the DEA for all practical purposes has a carte blanche that would make James Bond seem restricted. They can cut corners, use other federal agencies. They're mavericks. I've heard reports, unofficial of course, that they've made people disappear, recruited CIA agents, used the whole bag of dirty tricks, even tried to assassinate a Central American dictator."

The redhead was getting hotter than Gentry's so-called coffee. "I can't believe what I'm hearing. These guys are breaking the law at will, and nobody cares enough to do diddly-squat about it. I thought the Watergate mentality was dead and buried. Crap, DEA or not, nobody does what they did to me and gets away with it."

"What are you thinking about doing?" said Gentry, not looking Shayne in the eyes.

"When I've got a complaint, I don't go to the first floor—I start with the penthouse."

"Not with Gar Ragland you don't." Gentry stared the redhead in the eye. "Garland Hartford Ragland, the Chief of Narcotics Investigation for Dade County. They say, and I believe it, that when the doctor

smacked him on the bottom, Ragland punched him in the balls."

SHAYNE SHIFTED IN HIS SEAT AGAIN. HE HAD BEEN SITTING in Ragland's outer office for over two hours. Although a steady stream of visitors had gone into the room marked CHIEF NARCOTICS INVESTIGATION, the receptionist had maintained in very formal secretaryese that "Mr. Ragland, though his schedule is full, is trying to work you in."

While she repeated her spiel the next time, the redhead glanced at the number on her phone. As she then ushered a grizzled figure who tried to look like he had spent the night in one of the Magic City's finer flophouses in, Shayne stepped into the hallway and slipped a quarter into the payphone.

"Chief Ragland's office," answered the receptionist.

Disguising his voice, the redhead said, "This is Tony Pegus of the Office of Naval Intelligence. I sent an agent over there. I haven't heard a word from him and he was due in your office two hours ago to talk with Gar. Did he ever show up?"

"I don't think so," she said with interest. "What did he look like?"

"Special Agent Shayne is tall, redhaired . . ."

"Omigosh! He was here."

Shayne dropped the phone and re-entered the office.

"Are you Special Agent Shayne from ONI?" the receptionist inquired immediately.

Shayne put his finger to his lips even though the room was empty and took the phone from her. "Sir, I'm not certain this phone is secure," he said and paused. "They're giving me some kind of runaround. He's in all right." He paused again. "Sir, I know Senator Kennedy needs the information." Pause. "I'm sure they care about the appropriations."

When the receptionist appeared seconds later dragging the Serpico look-alike behind her, she said, "Mr. Ragland has found he has the time now."

Shayne walked into an office that looked like a file ranch. Manila folders were piled on various tables as though they were multiplying. From behind a tall stack emerged an emaciated figure with a limp.

"Now what the hell is going on? Appropriations, ONI. My secretary's ready to wet her pants."

Shayne flipped out his I.D. and threw it down on Ragland's page-covered desk. "That mean anything to you?"

"Should it?"

"You can make book on it. I just caught two of your flunkies, Swift and Roberts, illegally recording my phone conversations."

"Is that what this is all about? Listen, Shayne, I may walk with a wooden leg, but I can still kick ass. Now get out. I don't have time for all this cloak and dagger garbage."

"As soon as you show me the warrant to tap my phone."

"Christ, Shayne, or whatever your name is, what do you think the DEA is, some mom-and-pop operation? I don't know everything my field operatives do. You got a complaint. You go back down to the first floor, and if you can fill out enough forms and get back this high, then I'll talk to you."

"I'll make you a better offer," said the big redhead, tapping a Camel on the Chief's government-issue desk. "You give me a straight answer and I won't have to file you in one of those folders."

"Shayne, have you ever seen what a .45 slug can do to a man's chest at five feet?" Ragland pulled out an automatic from behind a stack of papers. "Ugly, very ugly. Jeez, I hate filling out reports. You know the type—drug dealer lies his way into office, packing a piece, he threatens me, and in self-defense I have to open a door—in his chest. No questions asked."

Shayne realized the narc was right. This wasn't your average bureaucratic stonewall. Ragland was definitely no-nonsense.

The redhead pivoted. As he walked out the door, he said, "You probably did punch that doctor—twice."

VI

NORMALLY WHEN SHAYNE WANTED A NEW YORK STRIP, he headed for his favorite booth at the Beef House. A thick cut, a cold draft, and some lively conversation with friends. But tonight he wanted to be alone to think, to reflect instead of to react, to pull things together. It had all happened so fast—being shot at, the expensive retainer, the phone tap, the fight, the retreat from Ragland's office. Yeah, the redhead decided, it had been a helluva day.

Now, sitting under the gaudy neon announcing The Cock & Bull, he had second thoughts. The stringy steak caught in his teeth, and he tasted more meat tenderizer than beef. The flat beer stared up from a tiny paper cup like a urine specimen.

Lighting up a Camel, he sprinkled the ashes in a crude question mark. Why was the DEA interested in him? Sure, some of his cases had involved drugs, but only on a small scale. Nothing to interest the top narcs. So why the tap, the apparent coverup, the phony Mike Shayne?

One answer sat in his craw alongside of the steak. It involved Jack Barnes. Barnes had a satchel full of money, and he was tight-lipped about his business. That was how Will had described the drug

trade—quiet and lucrative.

O.K., Shayne reasoned, let's say Mr. Moneybags was heavy into dope, and the DEA was after him, the Big Enchilada Swift had spoken of. Why would they set up a phony detective? To infiltrate Barnes' organization? Barnes had hired the bogus redhead only after receiving threats from a mysterious woman. Was she part of the overall DEA scam? Probably. Still, how did the feds know Barnes would contact Mike Shayne out of all the detectives in the Miami Yellow Pages?

No matter how the big detective entered the maze of events, one figure stood at the center—Jake Barnes.

AFTER CROSSING THE KENNEDY CAUSEWAY, SHAYNE headed the Buick north on Collins toward Surfside and Bal Harbour. He still wasn't certain how to play the hand he had. In fact, he wasn't even sure what cards he was holding. He knew he shouldn't let Barnes on to his suspicions about the businessman's relationship to drugs, but he didn't know whether Barnes had any inkling that the DEA was investigating him.

He had to make things happen. The card he played would have to uncover the key fact in the case: who had suggested Mike Shayne to Barnes?

Shayne turned left down the street the business card had listed as Barnes' home address. It never ceased to amaze the rangy investigator that crossing the causeways to Miami Beach was like entering another world. Sprawling Spanish architecture replaced the decaying tenements, gleaming foreign cars took the place of paint-peeled Chevys, and the streets were quiet and deserted. Yeah, like he told Lucy, the rich were a different breed.

The long Buick passed beneath a stucco archway and circled a football field of a yard. Walking down a gauntlet of marble statues, Shayne rang the bell. The tune should have been "We're in the money."

After a minute a medium-built man in a black suit appeared and said with a "Deliveries to the rear" voice, "Yes?"

Shayne quickly explained who he was and that he needed to see Mr. Barnes.

"The master has retired to his study, but if you will wait right here, I'll check with him."

While the major domo was gone, Shayne studied the surroundings. This was no house—it was a palace. Crystal chandeliers, individually lit paintings, and French provincial furniture. And, unlike so many of the homes of the super rich, it all fit.

He heard the major domo returning, his sharp heels clicking down the hardwood hallway. "Mr. Barnes," announced the servant, "will see you now."

As they started toward the back of the house, the unmistakable echo of a gunshot filled the mansion.

Shayne unhesitatingly sprinted toward the noise. Then he heard a scream. He rounded a corner. Standing in an open doorway was Brett Barnes, her eyes closed tightly in pain and her hands shaking in the air.

The redhead stepped past her. Lying on the floor beside an oak desk was Jake Barnes.

As the big detective knelt down to feel for what he knew he wouldn't find, a pulse, a sound from the French doors behind the desk caught his attention.

Shayne looked up in time to see the disappearing face of a young, dark-haired woman.

VII

SHAYNE HAD GOTTEN LUCKY. FIRST, AS THE WOMAN OUT-side had fled, he had noticed something, something on her lapel, but he hadn't been able to draw it into focus. Small . . . gold . . . pointed. Second, although he was in enemy territory—Miami Beach was Petey Painter's turf—the investigating officer was Scotty McDonald, a young lieutenant with no ax to grind on the redhead's nose.

The big detective reluctantly answered his routine questions. Yes, he had seen somebody, the woman on the patio. No, he hadn't recognized her. No, he hadn't chased her, because a hysterical Mrs. Barnes had grabbed him and begged him to call an ambulance and then the police. Yes, he'd wait and take the familiar trek downtown even though he hated pouring through the MBPD's family photo albums.

While he hung around, he watched McDonald try to interview a distraught Brett Barnes. Through tears and broken words, she described how she had been bringing her husband coffee when she had heard a shot. Opening the door to his study, she saw him on the floor. When McDonald asked about the woman the redhead had seen, she claimed she hadn't seen anybody.

McDonald let her go and directed the men spraying for prints and taking pictures. Shayne followed her into the spacious living room. Having overheard that her personal physician would be arriving any second, the detective sat down on a green divan beside the quivering mass of white silk that was Brett Barnes.

"I know it's a tough time to talk," he said, "but do you know anything about who the woman threatening your husband was?"

"I know she exists," she sobbed, "because Jake told me about her right after he left you. Jake tried . . . tried so to shelter me from such things. I've had problems in the past and . . ."

"Easy," he said.

"I'm so sorry about what happened up in your office this morning."

"Don't worry about it. Tell me, I didn't see your husband's briefcase back there. Did he put it away before this happened?"

"He must have." She buried her red face in trembling hands. "I'm so alone. I've always been afraid of being alone. What am I going to do?"

Thinking of all the illegal money her husband had possessed, the redhead took a chance. "Did you know he was into drugs?"

"Jake!" Her face whitened. "Are you saying somebody killed my husband over drugs?"

Shayne wondered. That briefcase offered 999 thousand good reasons for murder.

THE REDHEAD'S LUCK HELD OUT. BY THE TIME HE DROVE
down to the MBPD central headquarters, his nemesis had gone home for the night. Good. The one nightcap he didn't need was another not-so-friendly joust with Petey.

McDonald opened a door on the third floor for him. "The new police artist," he said.

Shayne entered to see a slight man topped by a crewcut sitting in front of a computer terminal.

"Meet GUS," said McDonald proudly.

Shayne stuck his hand toward the crewcut.

"Not me," said the sitting figure with a laugh. He pointed at the computer. "This is GUS—the Graphic Unit Synthesizer."

The redhead wondered what protocol governed introductions to a machine.

The crewcut typed, HELLO GUS.

"Hello, Bruce," said the computer's tinny voice.

McDonald said, "GUS is new, but much more efficient than the old way."

The crewcut, punching up a series of facial shapes on the large monitor, said, "Choose one."

Shayne picked a heart.

Across the bottom of the screen scampered various hairdos.

"She wore it short," Shayne insisted. "Like model 28."

The operator struck a key, and the curly hair was superimposed atop the heart-shaped face.

"It swept right to left and was a little longer," decided the detective.

"Easy," said the crewcut. He typed a bit and like magic he had her general outline.

Fifteen minutes later Shayne had to admit he was amazed. By running various noses, eyes, mouths, etc. across the screen and adding his choices, GUS produced a composite that looked like a facial portrait of the woman he had seen on the Barnes' patio.

"Want a souvenir?" said the crewcut.

"Sure," said Shayne.

While a printer chattered away, McDonald explained, "Next, GUS will run that face through our files and kick out anything close."

"It sure beats hours of pouring over mug books," said Shayne.

"Here you go," said the crewcut, handing Shayne a printout.

The redhead folded it up and stuck it in his coat pocket. By the time he walked into the humid evening air, he was dragging. It had been a long day.

HE POINTED THE BUICK AT THE MAINLAND AND LET IT
take him toward home. His mind chugged along at three-quarter speed. Maybe, he told himself, that was why he still couldn't identify the gold object he had seen on the darkhaired woman.

Why was he even worrying about her, he asked himself. He had been paid for a day's work, and he had certainly put that in. His client was dead, and the police got paid to take it from here. Besides, a stiff couldn't very well be threatened, could it?

But, damn it, Mike Shayne didn't operate that way. Since he had been a kid, he had always finished what he had started. He didn't consider himself a philosopher by a long shot, even a moralist, but if for no other reason than to live with yourself, you had to have some kind of code, no matter how basic it was.

No, he wasn't going to take the money and run. He was going to finish this case N/C—No Charge.

Miami's midnight lights winked seductively at the other end of the causeway. He rolled down the windows, shut off the air conditioner, and let her warm breath wash across his tired body. God, he loved that city.

His neck suddenly jerked forward. Something had struck the Buick from behind. Lodged in his rear-vision mirror was a black van with smoked windows.

The Buick lurched again, jolting him fully awake. What was going on?

Shayne tromped the accelerator and pushed the powerful Buick well

above the limit. He leapt off the causeway with the van close to his tail.

He wheeled right in a screeching slide. A trashcan scattered garbage redundantly across a dirty, deserted street. The van closed the distance quickly and struck again.

Feeling the jolt more strongly this time, the detective ignored the next red light and sped between two startled drivers. Still the van stayed.

Shayne was glad the Buick was so bulky and afforded protection from the motorized battering ram as the deadly game of tag continued down the sidestreets and avenues. That was no ordinary vehicle pursuing him, decided the detective. And whoever was driving hurtled the customized van through the ghetto neighborhood like a demon that would not be denied.

At an empty intersection the van caught up and plowed into the Buick's tail. Catching the heavy bumper, it spun Shayne around like a berserk top.

The Buick coughed to a stop. Shayne turned the ignition as the van kept going. The engine turned over, but wouldn't catch.

He'd never catch his pursuer now. Then through a dirt-splattered windshield, he saw that wasn't going to be his major problem. The van had skidded through a 180-degree turn.

He hit the starter again. Nothing.

Like a locomotive, the dark van picked up speed.

Frantically Shayne twisted the key. He smelled the gasoline fumes. The van was half a block away and closing fast. Too fast.

If the ignition didn't catch this time, he was in trouble. It was too late to bail out.

He turned the key.

The Buick's engine roared. Shayne snapped the car into DRIVE and fried the tires.

He almost made it.

As the Buick jumped forward, the speeding van struck the left rear fender.

Shayne felt his world tumbling over and over.

Just before blackness struck the redhead, an image of the dark-haired woman flashed before him.

As if an angel, she was wearing golden wings.

VIII

ANGELS. THEY WERE EVERYWHERE. GARBED IN WHITE, they hovered around him. They seemed to be talking to him, but he couldn't hear their voices.

Well, at least his friends had been wrong. They had always told him

that the place he ended up would be a little hotter than this and the attendants would be armed with pitchforks.

That was it. The attendants here were carrying something else. He blinked his eyes and shook his head. Then he drew in a deep breath.

Ammonia. He sat up slowly.

"Mr. Shayne, you must lie back down. A person who went through what you just did shouldn't even think about getting up."

The redhead ignored the nurse and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. He became aware he was wearing a white robe.

"Where are my clothes?" he said.

He noticed that his bed had wheels and he was in a hallway outside a room marked EMERGENCY.

"Now lie down," commanded the same voice. "We couldn't find anything more serious than a few bruises and a slight concussion, but we're holding you anyway for twenty-four-hours of observation."

"The hell you are, lady."

His deep voice acted like a magnet. Several nurses gathered around. He reached under the bed and pulled out his clothes.

"Where can I change?" he growled.

"Nowhere in this hallway," volunteered an interested blonde in white.

Shayne scanned the corridor. No broom closet. No doors period. Not even a phone booth. "What the hell," he said.

He untied the gown and let it fall to the cool floor.

"Mr. Shayne," squealed a nurse.

But, he noticed, none of them looked away.

Had he been in Hole-in-the-wall, Wyoming, he would have been in trouble. One of the nurses had recovered enough to explain that his car had been a total wreck and that she got off duty at 6:00 A.M. But in the Magic City, even at 2:10 in the morning, flying carpets with hungry meters to feed appeared regularly.

Sometime between the moment his car had flipped and he had awakened in Miami Mercy, the mystery of the darkhaired woman with golden wings had unraveled. What he had seen on her lapel, he now knew, was a tiny pair of golden wings.

She was a stewardess. And the quickest way to find a stew in this town in the middle of the night, he thought as he patted the printout in his pocket, was to see Fernando.

THE REDHEAD'S EARS WERE ASSAULTED BY THE ROAR of something that passed for music, but sounded more to him like the jets taking off at Homestead. In front of him bald girls were banging

into guys who looked like the last of the Mohicans—and worse.

From a sunken stage ringed by pea-green lights, a group of J.D.'s seemed more intent on destroying their instruments than playing them. And if that weren't enough, the lead singer's main job must have been to pelt the demolition-derby dancers with all sorts of rotten vegetables.

Off to the right was a clean table with five people at it—four very attractive women and one Latin-looking figure. His coal-black hair was swept back, and he had more teeth than the entire Osmond family. He looked quite preppy in deck shoes and white slacks, but with his polo shirt having a tear where the logo had been, he appeared stripped of his rank.

"Sorry to see your alligator passed on," said Shayne.

"Ah, Miguelito," answered the Hispanic.

"Ah, Fernando," said the redhead. "I see you've found a way to get through these hot, tropical nights we've been having."

"Would you believe that I, Fernando Juan Chico Garcia, could make such a mistake that I forgot that I have asked each one of these beautiful señoritas out for the very same evening."

"They say," said the redhead, lighting up two Camels and handing his friend one, "that excessive sexual relationships can lead to a loss of memory."

"What did you say your name was again?" said the darkhaired man. Shayne couldn't help but laugh. "I need a favor."

"*Por favor*, take one. Perhaps four is being too greedy." He squeezed the two women on either side of him, and they squealed like pet poodles.

Shayne pulled the picture out of his pocket. Unfolding it, he handed it to Fernando. "I know it's a long shot, but does this girl look at all familiar?"

The Hispanic took the picture and began to study it.

"She had dark hair, about five-five, a stewardess," added Shayne.

Fernando stood up and clicked his fingers as though he were about to tango. "Last year I was on this flight back to Miami from L.A. No, Atlanta. Delta. This *muy bieno* little brunette, she spill coffee on my new pants. When she tries to wipe it off, we both feel something. She takes me to a friend's apartment when we land here. There were three, no, four of the fair sex. She was the fourth. She is our lady of the sorrows. She retire early."

Shayne was elated. "Do you remember her name?"

"I always remember names. This is Sally," he said, pointing to the smiling brunette on his far left. "This is Brenda . . ."

"The girl in the apartment," pressed the redhead.

"Catherine . . . Catherine Barkley," said Fernando. "Ah, Miguelito, you still have the taste cordon bleu, but if I were you, I would worry about Hurricane Lucile."

"Thanks for the information and the weather forecast," said Shayne, "but the faster I find this lady, the happier Lucy will be."

"Ah, a *menage a trois*. Miguelito, I do think you are finally catching on to the spirit of the age." He patted a blonde on the thigh.

"Can I use your phone?" said the big detective.

"*Mi casa, su casa.* The office is unlocked. If you're feeling musical tonight, there's a little lady in my top right drawer to help you toot your horn. But, my friend, I thought it was us Hispanics who were supposed to be so hotblooded we could not wait?"

"I know you won't understand this, Fernando," said Shayne, avoiding Fernando's offer of coke, "but this has nothing to do with sex."

"No, Miguelito, you are wrong. Everything has to do with sex. Am I right, ladies?"

SHAYNE LEFT THEM NODDING AND PURRING, AND walked back to Fernando's office. Despite the lover-boy facade, Fernando was a business genius. Whenever the trend changed, he switched decor. Yesterday, a Western saloon; tonight, The Hideaway, a punk-rock palace.

Quickly the detective thumbed through the phone book. A Catherine Barkley was listed as living at an address he recognized as one of those single complexes just west of Gables.

He was sitting on the desk staring at Fernando's bull-shaped telephone when he remembered something. Reaching into his shirt pocket, he withdrew the slip of paper he had found on Roberts earlier that day. Looking down at the number, he debated with himself. Why not? Somebody was more apt to be in at night than during the day.

He dialed the number, the one to which Barnes' call to him had been diverted.

"Hello," answered a man who sounded out of breath.

The redhead decided on a direct approach. It was more his style. "This is Mike Shayne and . . ."

"Who?" said the voice at the other end.

"Mike Shayne. I'd like to ask . . ."

"Listen, buddy," interrupted the voice, "this must be some kind of sick joke."

"What are you talking about?" asked Shayne.

"I'm standing here looking at an I.D. that belongs to a man lying on the floor. He's dead and his name is Mike Shayne."

IX

SHAYNE SHUDDERED AT THE SIGHT ON THE HARDWOOD floor. Yeah, he had seen dead men before, but this redhaired figure brought death too close. The big detective had a detached sense, a sense of being present at his own wake, and it scared the hell out of him. Maybe the years of feeling death's cold breath but never its final embrace had given him a false sense of immortality. Maybe his looking for a phone booth at the hospital hadn't been such a joke after all—he had adopted a kind of Superman complex.

"Holy shit, Mike! You're alive!" Coming up from behind the investigator, Will Gentry embraced Shayne in his beefy arms and held him tightly. "Got a call," explained the cop. "Woke me up. I almost broke my neck getting here because they told me you'd cashed in your chips. Geez, he looks like you."

"Yeah," said Shayne without raising his eyes, "a dead ringer."

One of the police chief's investigators handed him a plastic bag. Gentry held it up to the single overhead bulb and read the inscription aloud. "Star-Double, Inc."

"Isn't that the talent agency that specializes in finding people who look like celebrities?"

"Yep. Then they book them for various occasions. Mall openings, gags. At my last birthday party my wife did me in. Who shows up but Raquel Welch. I didn't figure it out till she gave me her autograph, Bertha Ann Grachowski."

"Sir," said a uniformed policeman, "there's another body in the bedroom. Same M.O. Temple shot."

"Executed," said Shayne.

"I'll be right back, Mike."

Instinctively the redhead followed his friend. As soon as the burly cop looked through the doorway, he turned and put his hand on the redhead's chest. "You don't want to see her, old friend."

"Lucy," said Shayne.

Gentry nodded.

Shayne caught the bile rising up his throat like a runaway elevator. He walked over to a window in the cheap flat and hung his head out. Sure, he knew it wasn't really his secretary, but there were some things he didn't even want to consider.

BECAUSE SOMEONE HAD SCRAPED THE SIDE OF FERN-

ando's canary-yellow XKE, the redhead felt like he was driving around a rotten banana. Well, it beat a taxi, but not by much. The unmuffled exhaust gave it all the subtlety of a Phantom jet. That's why he had loved the old gray Buick. It melted into the traffic, yet the power was there with the hard press of the pedal.

It was almost four o'clock when the redhead pulled up in front of the Coral Gables apartment building that had finally quieted down for the night. By now, the detective figured as he walked into the lobby, everyone had made their choices. In another hour or two they'd all be returning to their own apartments to get ready for another day. Maybe Fernando was right and it did all revolve around sex.

A guard at the security desk was staring at a bank of monitors. On one of them four guys and a girl were playing Love Boat on a waterbed.

"Tell Catherine Barkley I want to see her," said Shayne.

"At this time of morning?" said the guard without looking at him. "I ain't auditioning no comedians now."

Shayne picked up the phone and dropped it in the exposed figure's lap. He winced and grabbed his crotch.

"You go for your nightstick," said Shayne, "and I'll show you a new place to stick it."

Something in Shayne's voice scared the guard more than dropping the telephone had. He dialed a number and let it ring. "Miss Barkley, this is security downstairs. We hate to trouble you, but there's a guy who needs to see you." He turned to the redhead. "What's your name?"

Shayne told him.

The guard spoke into the receiver and then said, "She claims she never heard of you."

"Tell her we met earlier this evening at Jake Barnes'."

The guard relayed the message and then said, "Go on up. 211." Then he turned back to watch the Love Boat sink.

Shayne massaged his neck as he rode up. He needed a real lift. The accident, the lack of sleep, the sight of the dead body—they were taking their toll.

After one knock the door into 211 opened. The darkhaired woman he had seen earlier let him in. Instead of the gold pin she was wearing jeans and a FSU sweatshirt.

"I had a feeling it would be you," she said. "Let's get this over with."

She sat down on a luxurious white couch. Shayne sat across from her. He lit up a Camel. His mind wasn't telling him what to say.

"I didn't kill him," she said, "but I wish I had."

"What?" said the surprised detective.

"Jake Barnes deserved to die for what he did to my daddy."

"Your daddy?" Shayne had the nightmarish feeling of running as fast as he could, but not keeping up. She was gaining on him.

"Daddy was the president of the Pine City Bank. Pine City's a little town west of Tallahassee. Near the coast."

"What was Jake Barnes to your father?" said the redhead as he filled his lungs with smoke.

"Tempter. He dangled a million dollars in front of daddy. For a year daddy kept turning him down, but with the recession Pine City industry was hurting. People needed loans just to keep afloat. Only way daddy could get the money was to do business with Jake Barnes."

"What kind?"

"Why the laundry business."

"I don't follow you," Shayne began, and then it hit him. Satchels of a cool million. A banker. "Jake Barnes wanted your father to launder his dirty money."

"From what little daddy finally told me, a Miami drug operation gave the money to Barnes because he was clean. He gave the money to Barnes because he was clean. He gave the money to my father, who in turn was to deposit it in banks all over the Caribbean."

"What happened?"

"The I.R.S. audited the Pine City Bank. Then some bank examiners. There's a law that says a bank has to report every deposit over \$10,000. Of course, my daddy had been well paid not to do it, but they caught him. They took away his charter or whatever it is they do. Left him bankrupt and without a reputation. One morning my dear, sweet daddy who had done it all only to help his friends in Pine City—never kept a dime of that dirty money for himself—well, he went down to his boat at St. Marks to do a little fishing. Half that town saw him stick a pistol in his throat and pull the trigger."

Slowly Shayne ground out his cigarette. "And you knew all about it?"

"My momma died in childbirth. Daddy raised me. We were real close."

"Close enough to get revenge?"

"You got it, if somebody hadn't beaten me to it."

"You didn't kill Jake Barnes?"

"I told you that. I made up my mind to do it a few months ago. Moved to Miami. I threatened him a couple of times, then last night I got up the nerve. Drove over there, parked my car, and started in to his

estate. I was about a few feet away when I heard a shot. Went running toward the house to see what had happened. I peered in those patio doors. She was listening to this man."

"Who's 'she'?"

"His wife. The one they all call Lady Brett."

Shayne believed her whole story, especially the last part. He had known Brett Barnes had lied to him right after it had happened, but he didn't know why. She had said she was bringing her husband coffee, but she wasn't carrying any when he had shown up and there wasn't any in the study. "Did you hear what they said?"

"No."

"Do you know who she was talking to?"

"No. Just another man."

No, thought the redhead. Not just another man. A man who had cold-bloodedly killed probably three people in the short space of a few hours.

X

SHAYNE SCREECHED THE FOUR-WHEELED BANANA TO A halt in the familiar driveway. He broke into a trot down marble row. In the pre-dawn hour the house was dark.

After he had been knocking for a minute, the door opened cautiously. His hair disheveled and wearing a dark robe, the major domo peered out. His sockets were ringed in a deep red.

"Brett Barnes," barked the redhead. "Where is she?"

"Certainly not in mourning as would be proper. Madame left a little while ago."

"Where to?"

The servant hesitated.

"Quick, man," commanded the redhead.

"I believe she and the gentleman . . ."

"What gentleman? What did he look like?"

"He called shortly after the police left. He waited in the car for her. They were going to the Harbour Yacht Club. The master, rest his soul, had a boat there, the SANTIAGO."

"Thanks," said Shayne as he started for the car.

"One more thing, sir," said the major domo. "When you find her, for what she did to her master, make the bitch pay."

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A BEAUTIFUL SUNRISE, BUT SHAYNE didn't have time to pay attention to the rising orange slice. A few fishermen had told him where the SANTIAGO was moored, but by the

time he located the slip, it was empty.

"Just left," volunteered a nearby yachtsman who was throwing fishing gear into his craft. He pointed toward the dawn.

Shayne spotted a fifty-footer approaching the end of the pier. The boat was slowly maneuvering its way toward the open water.

The redhead was sprinting down the sun-bleached boards before he was aware of it. Like a football, the detective flew toward the departing craft. Their paths would cross just as the boat passed the end of the pier.

Shayne knew he had but one shot, and the game was on the line. As he hit the end of the pier, he planted his right foot and hurtled himself into space.

Below him the boat had just passed the final HYC blue pennant. He glimpsed the twin screws churning. He was going to miss, and that meant he'd be fed to the meatgrinders beneath.

In mid-air he twisted his sinewy body. His hands strained, almost pulling his shoulders from their sockets. He reached out. With the force of a wild haymaker, his left hand scraped the deck railing and slid off.

His right fingertips felt and clutched the warm metal. His shoulder separated, but he was dangling there. By fingers he hung like a human pennant rippling in the wind. As the boat bounced through the waters, pain shot through his body with every move.

He began to swing, timing it to correspond with the rise of the boat. At the apex of his arc he threw his left hand toward the rail. He missed. Below him propellers sliced the water like ripsaws. He was losing strength. How many more chances would he have before his hand slipped loose?

In one desperate surge the redhead reached for the corroded rail. His aching fingers wrapped around the metal. Slowly and methodically he pulled himself up and over onto the polyurethaned floor. For a minute he lay there, willing his body back into a single piece.

The deck was deserted. Above him Shayne heard voices. A man and a woman's. Both were familiar.

"I don't like it," said Brett Barnes. "Jake and I had a good thing going. I don't want to turn my end of the business from banking into manufacturing. Besides, that acetone you brought aboard is dangerous stuff."

"We need it to cut the coke we're going out there to buy," said the male voice. "I don't like it either, but changes had to be made. Why did you decide to lie to Shayne and the cops if you didn't like the idea of our new management team?"

"My marriage to Jake may have been based on business, not love, but that was no reason to kill him."

"That blueblood didn't have it. You watched him unraveling," said the man. "Didn't you tell me you tried to kill Shayne because you were afraid your husband would compromise the operation by letting an outsider get close?"

Brett said, "The woman who was threatening him was driving him beyond his usual good sense."

"You fool! I had that angle covered. Who do you think suggested your dear Jake go to that nickel-and-dime gumshoe in the first place?"

"You? Why didn't you give one of your pushers a few extra grams to get rid of her?"

"I would have, but I figured the less people who knew about the possibility of Jake's going over the edge, the better. Besides, if my pusher had bungled it, your connection with the Organization could have come to light."

"So you set up your own detective agency," she concluded.

"Yeah, one tap and two bad actors. I suggested that Jake call a real pro like Shayne about that woman, and the rest was working like a machine. Everything would have been fine if you hadn't overheard what you thought was your husband blowing your operation and gone after the real Mike Shayne with a gun."

"Are you saying I'm at fault for ruining two year's worth of successful redistributing of dope money?"

"Not if you go along with my little change in plan."

Shayne had heard enough. His hunch was right. There were only two men in a position to know what Brett Barnes' new business partner had done. Shayne climbed the final step of the ladder and vaulted onto the steering deck. His .38 drawn, the rangy redhead pointed it at the startled couple. "Supplementing your government paycheck, Swift?"

"What are you talking about?" said the doubly surprised woman.

Shayne said, "Didn't the Cocaine King tell you he moonlights for the Drug Enforcement Administration?"

"You, the law?" gasped Brett.

"That's right," said Swift, "and congratulations, Shayne, you just screwed up one of the biggest drug busts in history."

"Sure, pal," said the redhead, "and next you'll try to peddle me a lakefront condo in the Everglades."

"You've had your fun playing detective, Shayne. Now if you don't want good times to turn into hard times compliments of Uncle Sam, you'd better stow that hardware and let me get on with this operation."

There's still time to salvage something."

"Put down my gun so I can be the fourth notch on yours?"

Neither his mind nor his body was hitting on all eight cylinders. Shayne thought he had put the pieces together right, but then he recalled what Will had said about the DEA—ruthless with carte blanche. Maybe Swift had killed those people out of some distorted sense of justice. It wouldn't be the first time a frustrated fed had figured the end justified the means.

"Get him, Brett," Swift yelled, shoving her toward the redhead.

His reactions slowed, Shayne saw her lunge and turned. The only way to stop her was to shoot her, but he couldn't do that. She fell against him. He pushed her aside.

In that short second he lost track of Swift. The metal gaff slashed downhard across his right wrist. The Smith & Wesson was catapulted in the air.

When he looked around, he was greeted by the wide eye of a .357 magnum.

"You two, downstairs." Swift ordered. "Sooner or later I was going to have to waste you, Shayne. I appreciate your coming to me."

The DEA agent put the woman between himself and Shayne. They descended the stairs and started down a hallway.

"In there," commanded Swift. He pointed to a small room to the right.

They entered a storeroom. A few fishing rods, a tackle box, a fire extinguisher, an extra anchor, and some tarpaulin.

"What are you going to do?" said Brett.

"Finish covering his trail," answered the redhead.

Swift said, "I'll take the powerboat back. This boat'll continue on autopilot for awhile, and then a bomb I've set is going to ignite that acetone Brett was so worried about. Puff. There won't be anything left but me and a million dollars."

"You can't just kill us," she said in disbelief.

"Oh, but I can. I just lock you in. There's no way to get out before the explosion, and afterwards there'll be absolutely no trace of the boat."

He locked the door and called through it, "You were wrong, Shayne. With you two gone, there'll be six notches on my gun."

Shayne knew a certain white-shirted figure wouldn't be tapping phones any longer. Swift was right. The door, as the redhead found from hitting it, did not give anything but sore shoulders. The porthole was too small for even Brett to escape.

He heard a small motor fire up, and he knew the timer was ticking.

They had only a few minutes before they would be attending their own funeral at sea.

The big detective hurriedly looked around while the blonde sobbed in a corner. How could anybody value life so little, he wondered, as to give up without a battle?

Still, as much as he wanted to fight, it looked hopeless.

XI.

A FIERY DEATH MOMENTS AWAY, SHAYNE STARED AT THE extinguisher atop the tarpaulin. Chemicals under high pressure.

The redhead opened the tackle box. Some lures, some leader, a mallet, hooks, a sheath knife.

A small chance, but it was the best he had. Damn it—it was all he had.

He lay the extinguisher on its side, its mouth a foot from the heavy door. He placed the knife point against the extinguisher base. Drawing back the mallet, he swung it hard.

Driven by the force, the steel tip punctured the thin metal base. Vapor spewed out the back, and as though launched from the Cape, the red missile crashed into the door.

Splinters flew and the door split at its base. Shayne quickly kicked the hole free. Taking the still-whimpering Brett Barnes, he pushed her through the opening and then followed himself.

Grabbing her arm, he started to drag her up the stairs.

"We'll never make it," she whined. "We're going to die."

Shayne ignored the possibility and yanked her topside.

"Come on," he yelled, "we're getting off this tub."

"No," she shrieked, "I can't swim."

"It's your only chance," he said, perched on the edge and ready to jump.

She pulled away and started running.

Shayne wondered if he should go after her. Well, she had made her choice.

He made his.

In mid-air the huge explosion confirmed that his decision had been the right one.

The force of the blast picked him up and like a human cannonball launched him toward shore.

The impact of the waves momentarily dazed him, but as soon as the water swept into his lungs, his instincts took over. He removed his pants. Tying each leg into a knot and zipping the fly, he put them behind him. Jerking the khakis over his head, he drove the air into

them.

With his makeshift waterwings, he began the long swim to shore. He never bothered to look back.

HEARING A COMMOTION OUTSIDE, GAR RAGLAND LOOKED up in time to see his frosted-glass door fly open. Standing in front of him was a tall man. Red stubble bristled from his face, water dripped from his clothes, and fire shot from his steel-gray eyes.

"What the hell!" exclaimed the DEA chief.

"Where can I find Swift?" said Shayne.

"I told you yesterday not to mess with the government," said the narcotics officer.

As Ragland reached for his .45, Shayne slammed his hand down on top and applied pressure on the government man. "Now," said the redhead, "I'm going to tell *you* something."

THE GREEN GOVERNMENT FORD SEEMED TO SHAYNE destined for the middle of the Everglades. He had been in the tropical forest before—most recently with the free-Cuba group, Libertad—but the DEA chief was following a series of roads that would have escaped even the native Seminoles' notice. The humidity and temperature were high, but had they been low, the big detective's head would still have been swimming.

"Shayne," said Ragland, "you look like one of my grunts just back from a 48-hour recon along the Thai border. Are you sure about what you told me?"

"As sure as you are where you're going," said the redhead. "Swift's on the other side now."

Ragland shoved his bad leg against the door. "Look, I'm not saying we're all as pure as The Lone Ranger, but. . . ."

"Hey, kemo sabay, he's killed at least five people by now. Can you cut the secrecy and tell me where we're headed?"

"O.K. A small aviation field. Used to belong to some Columbian *senores* till we took it, four airplanes, and three of their lives. Swift's intel group, The Bell-tollers, has used it before."

They shot through the palmetto and scrub pine so fast the foliage was almost a blur. Shayne had developed a grudging admiration for the Chief of Narcotics Investigations, but the thin man had built a wall around him, a coldness that came from more than bureaucracy.

"There it is," said Ragland as the Ford broke into a clearing.

They were sitting at the end of a gritty runway. At the other end a small Piper, the type Shayne knew was favored by those who flew the

Bogota Express, was just turning and starting toward them.

"He's taking off," shouted the redhead.

The Ford's customized power plant thrust the car forward. They passed a black van with smokey windows Shayne recognized all too well. The car, much faster than the plane, arrived at about the middle of the airstrip, and Ragland swung it into a power slide.

The Piper kept coming. The propeller churned in a deadly scene of *deja vu* for Shayne, and he could smell the burning aviation fuel.

"Look out," called the redhead. "He's not going to stop."

Ragland's door faced the onrushing plane. What's more, he couldn't get his leg to move. In a single motion Shayne threw open his door, grabbed the DEA head by the collar and yanked.

The two men hit the ground and rolled just as the plane veered to the side. In so doing, though, the pilot lost the speed necessary for take-off.

Shayne and Ragland were dazed as the Piper stopped. Swift jumped out and landed in the marksman's stance. "Nobody breathes," he shouted.

The redhead didn't move.

"Get over here, Gar," ordered the man with the .357.

Slowly Ragland dragged himself to his feet and limped over. Swift frisked him, threw away his government issue, and stood directly behind him. Training the magnum on his head, Swift shouted, "Shayne, back the piece of crap over to the side and throw me the keys."

Slowly Shayne did as he was told with the Ford. As he came back into range, Swift was explaining to his former boss, "I just got tired of watching those dealers light their cigars with K-notes. Even the ones we busted did a little hard time and got out to a stashed fortune."

"You had a responsibility," said Ragland.

"To myself, yes. For every joker we busted, ten got away. Remember the story of the little Dutch boy. Well, I'm damned sick of sticking my finger in a dike that's always springing another leak, and I'm tired of watching the big boys score more in one deal than I'll make in a lifetime of government service."

Shayne studied the situation closely. They were a good fifty feet apart. He was wearing his polo shirt and had been careful not to turn his back to Swift. Obviously the DEA renegade didn't know he was packing a .38 in the small. Just as obviously, even if he drew and fired, he didn't have a single inch of exposed target.

"I'm taking the money and heading for South America," continued Swift. "With this kind of money I can blend in till the heat's over and

live the way I should."

"If I get the chance," said Ragland, making it sound like a curse, "I'm going to take you out—the painful way."

The redhead knew the scenario. First, Swift would kill Ragland and then him. His only chance of survival was to shoot Ragland first and then take his chances with Swift. Could he deliberately kill a fed, a helpless hostage?

Ragland slumped to the left, his leg giving away, but Swift propped him up.

Of course, thought Shayne.

The rawboned redhead suddenly dropped to one knee. Before Swift could react, the big investigator pointed his .38 at Ragland and pulled the trigger.

The chief dropped to the ground as the lead slug tore through him.

In the second the ex-fed was exposed, Shayne fired again.

Swift spun around. His magnum flew up in the air, and he grabbed his right shoulder involuntarily.

Ragland winced and looked at the bullet hole in his left leg. "Not bad aim—for a civilian," he said. "A little plastic and I'll be as good as new."

Shayne crossed the distance quickly. Ragland crawled over to the magnum and stood up. Blood leaked slowly from Swift's shoulder, but he began to moan.

"You'll live," said Shayne, replacing the gun in the small of his back.

As he helped Ragland to his feet, the DEA chief did something inexplicable. He grabbed the gun from Shayne and shoved him.

"Turn your back," Ragland ordered the redhead.

"Hey, I'm not one of your men."

The magnum exploded. So did the sand between Shayne's loafers.

The big detective turned his back. A sudden thought crossed his mind. Earlier he had thought there were two possible murderers.

"Swift," shouted Ragland. "You guys who take the easy way out make me sick. You've got no ethics, no sense of right and wrong. Start crawling."

"No," said Swift. Shayne could tell he was scared.

"Nobody deserts my outfit, mister," said Ragland.

He fired.

Swift screamed.

Shayne started to turn.

"Don't," ordered Ragland.

Shayne obeyed as the DEA Chief said, "Now for the other one."

The magnum barked again.

Shayne had heard men tortured before, but not this barbarically. The sound that emerged from Swift's mouth was unholy, bestial.

"You'll never work for the United States Government again," said Ragland, "but you're in luck, Swift. You just qualified for the Vienna Boys' Choir."

"I'll . . ." Shayne started.

"Nobody will believe you," answered Ragland. "His gun, a deserted airstrip, a stripped Piper with extra fuel tanks. Just another drug deal that went down dirty."

"You bastard," said Shayne. "At least get it over quickly."

This time Ragland listened to him.

SHAYNE SAT IN THE BACK SEAT BESIDE A SATCHEL containing Barnes' drug money. "An anonymous donation from a citizen concerned with our War on Drugs," Ragland had said. Yeah, the fed was on the side of the angels, but now the angels were carrying pitchforks.

The big detective was more tired than he could ever remember being, but he didn't sleep the whole ride back. His eyes wide open, he watched the real world drift by beneath gray skies and wondered if he'd ever sleep again. •



Mike Shayne returns in
an offbeat yarn

SANDCASTLES
by Brett Halliday

DON'T MISS IT!

It had been a messy death, but it wasn't going to be the last one — or the messiest either!

Such Wonderful Memories

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

THERE WAS NO TRACE OF BLOOD ON THE CEMENT DRIVE-way, only hundreds of meandering hairline cracks embedded with dirt. Standing in the shade of the open garage door, Ken Taylor wondered whether the police had hosed the blood away or if rain had done the cleaning. Maybe there hadn't even been enough blood to make a mess. After all, old Uncle Harry had been as shrunken and brittle as a piece of dried rawhide. But no, Ken reasoned, even Uncle Harry's withered carcass would have bled under the weight of a full-size car.

With a faint smile curling his lips, Ken imagined what must have happened. Four months ago, in early spring, Uncle Harry had decided to change the oil in his ancient Oldsmobile. Of course, he would attempt the job himself, rather than paying a mechanic to service the car for him. The old man had backed the car halfway out of the garage and jacked up the front end. Then, armed with a wrench and a plastic basin, he'd slid beneath the chassis. He had almost finished unscrewing the drain plug when a sudden gust of wind had slammed the heavy garage door down against the trunk, jarring the car and upending the jack. The car had fallen, and the abrupt pressure on a balding tire had

caused it to explode. The entire weight of the Oldsmobile had smashed Uncle Harry onto the concrete.

Like the sole of a shoe squashing a bug, Ken mused. Then, aloud, he muttered, "Your cheapness finally did you in, Uncle Harry. If you'd parted with a few bucks to have the oil changed by a pro, you'd still be alive. For the first time in my life, I can thank you for being such a penny-pinching old coot."

Now, Uncle Harry was buried, and his house and all of his other possessions belonged to Ken, his sole heir. Only yesterday, Ken had moved his clothes from his old furnished apartment into the red brick bungalow. Never again would he have to worry about saving enough money from his paltry pay check to cover the rent. Ken could not recall the last time he had felt so thoroughly satisfied with life.

Ken's half-smile turned into a full-fledged grin. He'd spent several months toying with the idea of murdering Uncle Harry for the inheritance, but a chance gust of wind had saved him the trouble. Funny how things could change in such a short time.

KEN TAYLOR WAS TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS OLD, A TALL, SLIM young man with a handsome face and an ingratiating smile. Through years of practice, he'd learned to smile cheerfully, no matter how he felt inside. Uncle Harry had always expected his nephew to look happy and grateful, and Ken had been in no position to deny his uncle's wishes.

Before his death, Uncle Harry had been Ken's only living relative. His father had died when Ken was still an infant, and his mother had succumbed to a lifelong heart ailment two years ago. During the years he'd lived with his mother, Ken had been forced to see Uncle Harry regularly. Each contact with the old man had increased Ken's dislike for him. Uncle Harry was a cantankerous, opinionated Scrooge who seemed to enjoy squelching others' fun. Though he'd earned an enviable salary as an accountant, he'd lived an almost monastic existence and expected those around him to follow his example. It was no wonder that he'd never married or had any real friends.

Uncle Harry had often spoken of money, and he'd repeatedly intimated that he was quite wealthy. After his death, Ken was surprised and terribly disappointed to learn that his uncle's bank account was meager and that his life insurance would barely cover the most economical of funerals.

But, with a shiver of excitement, Ken recalled something that Uncle

Harry had said years before. "I've never trusted banks, Ken. A man's money is safer hidden in his own house than in one of those damned vaults. That way, it's always on hand when you need it, and you don't have to worry about another fiasco like the one in '29." Then, chuckling, the old man had added, "You've just got to remember that hundred dollar bills aren't pickles."

Now, in the shade of the garage door, Ken felt a keen anticipation. Somewhere in the house thousands upon thousands of dollars were hidden. All Ken had to do was find the money, and he'd be comfortably set for a long time to come.

Ken had no idea where the fortune might be, but he was certain that he'd find it eventually. After all, now that the house belonged to him, he could search its rooms from top to bottom without arousing any suspicions. And, since quitting his dead end job at the shoe store, he had plenty of time to go through the place thoroughly. Ken had even worked out a plan of attack. He would start in the attic and work his way down. He hoped to find the money before having to search the basement, though. Uncle Harry had never bothered to get rid of the clutter left by the previous owners of the house, and the basement was a filthy, bug-ridden mazes of boxes, junk, and discarded household goods. The very idea of going through that mess made Ken wince with distaste.

"HELLO THERE, NEIGHBOR," A VOICE CALLED OUT, STARTLING Ken from his thoughts. He turned and peered down the driveway at a plump woman in a flowered dress who was bustling toward him. She was in her mid-fifties, with a round, pleasant face and neatly curled salt-and-pepper hair.

"Welcome to Barnum Street, Ken," she smiled. "You remember me, don't you? I'm Enid Hammond, your next door neighbor. We met briefly at your uncle's funeral. It was a real tragedy what happened to Harry, but I'm glad he had family to leave the place to. Wonderful man, your uncle was. He used to love my home canned vegetables. I've got very fond memories of him, very fond, indeed. Fred and I couldn't have asked for a better neighbor. But I'm sure that you'll be a fine neighbor, too, Ken. I have no doubt of it."

Ken stared at the woman, trying hard to contain his amused annoyance. Enid had delivered her entire speech in a matter of seconds, talking faster than anyone Ken had ever met before. And he couldn't imagine Uncle Harry as being half the exemplary neighbor that Enid

described. The old tightwad had never been particularly friendly to anyone, let alone to a silly busybody.

"The house needs some work," Enid continued. "As soon as you tend to the lawn, paint the trim, and do some general clean-up, this place will be as tidy and attractive as every other house on the block. While Harry lived here, the house and lawn were always neat. You don't often have neighbors like Harry. Quiet, considerate, friendly — that was your uncle."

Ken nodded restlessly. He knew that his uncle had never gone out of his way to keep up the appearance of the house. He rarely cut the grass, and the wood trim around the windows had been chipped and peeling for years. Where did Enid Hammond get these glorified memories of Uncle Harry? Ken wondered. Apparently, she had created them to suit her own wishes.

"You know, Ken, your uncle and my son, Phillip, used to be the best of friends," Enid said in a wistful voice. "Harry was a lot older than Phil, of course, but they were still close. It was almost as if Harry were Phil's uncle, too. Your uncle took Phil's death very hard."

"What happened to your son?" Ken asked, the first words he'd managed to squeeze in since Enid's arrival.

The woman shook her head sadly. "Such a tragedy," she murmured. Then, in a louder voice, she said, "Phil loved music, absolutely adored it. He was forever going to concerts, listening to records, or playing the radio. Even while he was in the bathtub, he kept the radio on. A year ago, he was soaking in the tub, listening to the radio. He must have reached over to change the station, and the radio accidentally fell into the bathtub. He was electrocuted."

Tears sparkled in Enid's eyes as she recounted her son's death. "Phillip was our only child, but he was the best son that any mother or father could ever want. A lot of kids these days don't respect their folks, but Phil always adored his father and me. Phil was a mother's dream. Now that he's gone, I'll have to make do with memories of my devoted loving son. It's certainly not the same as having him here, but it's all I've got. I'll cherish those memories for as long as I live."

Listening to Enid's torrent of words, a vague recollection began to take shape in Ken's mind. On one of the few occasions he'd visited Uncle Harry during the last couple of years, the old man had complained bitterly about the teen-aged boy who lived next door. The kid had played his stereo at top volume night and day, filling the neighborhood with hard rock music. Uncle Harry had spoken to the boy

about it, but his complaints had been ignored.

"Half the time, the punk is out of his head on drugs," Uncle Harry had grumbled. "He treats his parents as if they're dirt under his feet. The father claims he can't control him at all, and the mother pretends there's no problem. Finally, I called the police into the matter. Phil lowered the volume for a few days, but, before long, he was playing it as loud as ever."

The next time Ken had seen his uncle, the old man had told him of the boy's death by electrocution. Chuckling, Uncle Harry had said, "The same music he tortured the neighborhood with ended up frying him. Good riddance to bad rubbish, I say."

While recollecting Uncle Harry's words, Ken failed to hear the beginning of Enid's fresh assault. When he once again became aware of her, he had little difficulty filling in what he'd missed. ". . . a wonderful husband. I don't know what I'd do without him. He's my source of strength. I'd have fallen apart when Phil died if Fred hadn't been there to comfort me. And it was Fred who found Harry crushed to death under the car. A woman couldn't hope to find a more patient, devoted, and loving husband. He retired from the printing shop soon after we lost Phil. Some couples have a hard time adjusting to being together so much when the husband stays home, but Fred and I feel as if we're on our second honeymoon."

It took Ken a moment to realize that Enid had stopped talking. She gazed up at him, smiling pleasantly. Then, she thrust a plate covered with aluminum foil toward him. "I almost forgot," she said. "I brought you these cookies as a welcoming gift. Fresh baked this morning. I hope you like chocolate chip cookies. They were always Phil's favorite."

Ken took the plate. "Thanks," he said, then added, "Well, I'd better get inside. There's a lot to do when you move into a new house."

"That there is," Enid agreed. "I can still remember when Fred and I moved into our place in 1948. It took us weeks to get settled in. Why, we were —"

"It is a lot of work," Ken interrupted, taking a step toward the side door of the house. "Thanks again for the cookies. Good-bye."

"You just holler if there's anything that I can do for you, Ken," Enid said. "After all, that's what neighbors are for. Canning season is almost here, and I'll be sure to bring you some of my specialties."

"You do that," Ken said, then he yanked open the door and stepped into the house. He paused on the landing and looked outside. As he

watched Enid walk down the driveway, he felt a sense of relief. He'd planned on having little to do with the neighbors, but Enid was going to make that difficult.

WHEN HE WAS CERTAIN THAT ENID WAS GONE, KEN PLACED the cookies on the kitchen counter. Then he walked to the stairway leading to the attic and hurried up the steps. The attic was crowded with trunks and cartons, and everything was covered with a heavy layer of dust.

As he began his search for Uncle Harry's money, Ken thought of Enid Hammond and marveled at the woman's capacity for self-deception. She'd spoken glowingly of both Uncle Harry and her son, and Ken knew that her memories of each of them were distorted beyond recognition. Apparently, the woman believed what she chose to believe, regardless of the facts.

Ken smiled as he rummaged through a trunk of musty, damp clothes. The time might come when he could make use of someone like Enid Hammond, he thought. If he ever needed a character witness, she would definitely be the one to contact. Obviously, the old fool only looked on the bright side of life and people. She didn't have a mean bone in her body.

SHORTLY BEFORE NOON THE FOLLOWING DAY, KEN RETURNED to the garage. He had spotted some tools on the workbench there, and he needed them to pry open a locked trunk in the attic. As he headed back toward the house with a hammer and a screwdriver, he heard a long moan of anguish. He glanced over at the Hammonds' backyard and saw a heavyset, gray-haired man staggering toward the fence.

"Harry's nephew, eh," the man said in a loud, slurred voice. "Are you the same kind of miserable louse that your uncle was?"

Ken stared at the man, taken aback by his words and his obvious drunkenness. He bore little resemblance to the man Ken had met at his uncle's funeral a few months before. "Fred Hammond?" Ken asked.

The man nodded, nearly stumbled, then grabbed onto the chain link fence for support. "Your uncle was one of the most hateful people I've ever known," Fred muttered. "He didn't even have the decency to say he was sorry when my son died."

Fred collapsed forward against the fence and began to sob. Ken

stood helplessly, not knowing what to do. Suddenly, Enid appeared beside her husband and took his arm.

"Come back into the house, Fred," she said. "Let's go back into the house, and everything will be all right."

Enid did not raise her voice, but Ken was startled by the restrained force and anger that her tone conveyed. Looking at her more closely, he saw that her usually animated face was frozen into a cold, grim mask. Perhaps, there was a side to the woman he had never suspected.

Fred raised an arm as if to push his wife away, then let it fall to his side. Enid tugged at his sleeve. "Just come with me, Fred."

Listlessly, Fred allowed Enid to lead him away.

"He's been taking a new medication that makes him behave this way," Enid called back to Ken. "He's just not himself this morning."

A moment later, the couple disappeared around the side of their house.

So her devoted and loving husband is a drunk, Ken thought. He should have realized it all along. After all, Enid Hammond made people whatever she wanted them to be — and she always wanted them kind and wonderful.

EARLY THAT EVENING, KEN FINISHED EXPLORING THE ATTIC. He'd gone through every trunk and box up there and had carefully examined the walls and floorboards for any possible hiding place. But he'd come across no trace of Uncle Harry's fortune. In disgust, Ken descended the stairs to the first floor and continued his search in the kitchen.

As he shoved pans aside on a shelf, the stillness of the evening was shattered by a loud, piercing siren. Ken stepped over to the window and saw an ambulance pull up in front of the Hammonds' house. Two white-clad attendants rushed up to the front door with a stretcher and disappeared inside. Moments later, they emerged carrying Fred Hammond on the stretcher. The man's eyes stared dully, and his mouth sagged open. There was no blood on his face. Enid followed close behind, weeping and wringing her hands.

Ken watched as the attendants slid the stretcher into the back of the ambulance and then helped Enid inside. Then, one of the attendants returned to the driver's seat, and the ambulance sped down the street, shrieking its farewell.

DURING THE NEXT FEW DAYS, KEN KEPT HIMSELF BUSY

searching the first floor of the bungalow, and he gave little thought to the Hammonds. He had no luck uncovering Uncle Harry's fortune, and he was beginning to experience the first twinges of desperation.

On Friday, after he'd thoroughly explored every room on the first floor without success, Ken decided that the money had to be in the basement. Whether he liked it or not, he would have to examine the boxes and junk that had accumulated there throughout the years. His skin crawled at the very thought of spending several hours in the dirty basement, but he had no choice. If he wanted the money, he'd have to go down there.

But he decided to postpone his misery until the next day.

Ken awoke early on Saturday morning, after a troubled night's sleep. Lying in bed, he cursed Uncle Harry for having hidden the money so well. Why couldn't it have been in the attic or in one of the first floor bedrooms? he wondered bitterly. Why did Uncle Harry have to put it somewhere in the basement?

Another idea occurred to Ken that was even more upsetting than exploring the cluttered basement. What if the fortune weren't in the house at all? What if Uncle Harry had moved it elsewhere before his death?

"No, that's impossible," Ken muttered forcefully. "He would have wanted to keep his money nearby. It must be in the basement."

With a new determination, Ken slipped out of bed and quickly began dressing.

Minutes later, as Ken sat at the kitchen table sipping coffee and contemplating the disagreeable chore that awaited him, he heard a rapping at the side door. Annoyed at the interruption, he walked over and opened the door. Enid Hammond stood outside. Though her plump face looked drawn and haggard, she managed a weak smile.

"Good morning, Ken," she said, speaking more slowly than usual. "I didn't wake you, did I?"

Ken shook his head.

"I expected to see you at the funeral," she said.

"Funeral?" Ken asked, feigning ignorance.

"Fred died on Monday," she explained. "He fell down the attic stairs. He hadn't been very steady on his feet since he started taking that new medication."

That medication is called booze, Ken thought. But he said, "I'm sorry to hear that. I've been so busy lately that I haven't been aware of anything going on in the neighborhood."

"Well, Fred was buried yesterday," Enid said in a choked voice. "There were quite a few people at the cemetery, but that came as no surprise. Fred was a well-liked man. He had many friends." Enid sighed sorrowfully. "I don't know what I'm going to do without Fred. He was my only reason for living since Phil's death. My wonderful son is gone, and now my beloved husband has joined him. Thank God for my memories. Such beautiful, comforting memories." She sighed again and rolled her tear-filled eyes skyward.

Struggling to control his own anxieties while listening to Enid's rambling speech stretched Ken's emotions to the snapping point. Suddenly, he could stand no more of the woman's self-deception. "What the hell do you want from me?" he demanded harshly. "Why don't you just sit home and wallow in your lies? Your wonderful son was a selfish drug addict, and your beloved husband was a drunk. If you choose to ignore the truth, that's your business, but don't expect me to agree with you. I'm in no mood to play games."

Enid stared at him, an expression of shocked disbelief on her face. "H-How can you say those things?" she stammered as tears streamed down her cheeks. "All I have left are my memories. Maybe I do gloss over people's faults and recall things more pleasantly than they actually were, but you have no right to mock my memories. Your uncle would never have been so cruel."

"Uncle Harry wouldn't have put up with your nonsense for ten seconds. You'd have me believing that Uncle Harry was a kind, benevolent man, when I know that he was a cantankerous old skinflint. He was pleased when your son died."

Enid gasped. "Well, I see there's no point in talking to you any longer, Ken. You're certainly not the neighbor I thought you were." Enid turned to leave, then halted abruptly and faced Ken again. Her hard expression reminded Ken of the afternoon she had led her drunken husband back into the house. "Just one final question, Ken," she said. "Did you find the pickles?"

"What pickles?" Ken snapped. Then he recalled Uncle Harry's remark about hundred dollar bills not being pickles, and his interest perked.

"Every year, I grow cucumbers in my garden, and I can them in the fall," Enid said. "I always gave five or six jars of them to your uncle."

"I haven't come across any jars of pickles," Ken said, smiling now. "I love pickles. Do you have any idea where Uncle Harry might have stored them?"

Enid paused thoughtfully for a moment, then said, "I imagine that he'd store the unopened jars in the fruit cellar. That's where I keep mine. They'll last for years as long as the seals aren't broken."

My God, that may be where the money is, Ken thought. Perhaps that's what Uncle Harry meant by his comment about the pickles. It was a long shot but certainly worth investigating.

"Haven't you been down to the fruit cellar yet?" Enid inquired.

"No," Ken replied. "I wasn't even aware that there was one until now."

"Oh, yes. All of the houses on this block have them," she said. "I'll show you where it is." Enid opened the screen door and stepped onto the landing, forcing Ken to the side.

"That's all right," Ken protested. "I'm sure I can find it."

"I want to make sure that none of the seals are broken if there are any jars left. I'd hate to have you eat bad pickles — even though you're obviously not the kind, thoughtful young man I'd first judged you to be."

Before Ken could make a reply, Enid hustled down the basement steps and switched on a light at the bottom. "What a mess!" she cried. "I've never seen such a cluttered basement. This place is a real fire hazard."

Ken hurried down the steps after her.

"Now, I'd guess that your fruit cellar is in the same spot where mine is. Yes, there it is."

Ken followed the woman toward a low wooden door that was held shut by a two by four laid across a couple of braces in the wall. One side of the two by four was bolted to the concrete wall so that it could be swung up and down easily.

"You've still got the original door," Enid said. "It's identical to mine. That door is as old as the house and solid as the Rock of Gibraltar."

Enid briskly lifted the thick bar of wood from the braces and yanked open the door. Inside the fruit cellar, all was pitch dark. "Go on in, Ken, and turn on the light. The pull cord should be dangling in the middle somewhere."

Ken drew in a deep breath, then stooped and entered the fruit cellar. He found it difficult to breathe the dank, sour air. He groped blindly for the cord, wishing that he had thought to bring a flashlight.

With a loud crash, the door slammed closed behind him.

"What the hell!" Ken cried, wheeling in the darkness. Then, he

heard the two by four thud into place. Ken reached out and pushed at the door. It remained firm. "Let me out," he shouted.

Enid made no reply.

Fighting to stay calm, Ken groped in the darkness. His hands brushed cobwebs, then touched wooden shelves. Reaching forward, he knocked over a glass container that smashed onto the floor and splattered his pants legs. The tiny room filled with the pungent odor of dill pickles.

Snatching back his hand in surprise, Ken felt a string. He clawed at the blackness until he located it again, then pulled it. The room was suddenly bathed in a faint, flickering light, cast by a bare bulb in the ceiling.

Ken blinked at the glow, then glanced fearfully around the fruit cellar. It was about four feet by six feet with concrete walls that were water stained and cracked with age. There were no windows. Spider webs filled the corners, and Ken shuddered as he spied several small creatures scurrying to safety. Then, he saw the shelves covered with canning jars. Some of the jars obviously contained pickles, but the others were filled with something else. Ken grabbed one of these jars and unscrewed the lid. He pulled a tightly folded bill out and opened it. A hundred dollar bill! Quickly, he counted the jars that held money. There were thirteen in all — and each of them was stuffed with folded bills.

I've found Uncle Harry's fortune, Ken thought, momentarily elated. Then, he heard the faint sound of footsteps mounting the stairs, and fear returned.

"Enid, what are you trying to do?" he shouted through the thick wooden door. But he knew the answer even before he'd completed the question. A rush of complete and utter terror constricted his throat and pumped sweat from every pore in his body. He realized that he would never leave the fruit cellar alive. When he was finally discovered, his death would be deemed accidental. People would believe that he'd stepped into the fruit cellar, and, somehow, the wooden bar had fallen into place, trapping him inside. No one would ever suspect that friendly, eccentric Enid Hammond had had anything to do with the tragedy, just as no one had ever considered her capable of tossing a radio into bath water or pushing her husband.

"She probably slammed the garage door on Uncle Harry's car, too," Ken said aloud.

THROUGH HIS FEAR, KEN KNEW THAT ENID HAMMOND WAS making a new memory. Once he was gone, he could be anything that she wanted him to be. And he had no doubt that she would want him to be the perfect neighbor. All of his faults would be forgotten. In memory, he was sure to be every bit as wonderful as Uncle Harry and Phil and Fred. But, first, he had to be every bit as dead.

That crazy old woman won't get away with it this time, Ken told himself. He'd open the door somehow. If that proved impossible, someone was bound to come looking for him sooner or later. He could survive indefinitely in the fruit cellar, unpleasant though it might be. There were even pickles to eat. Eventually, he would be rescued and then he'd be able to enjoy Uncle Harry's money and see to it that Enid Hammond was punished.

Feeling almost calm, Ken poured all of the bills from one of the jars and began counting them. Then, abruptly, he stopped. Through the strong odor of pickles, he'd detected another smell. He sniffed at the air, then let the bills he'd been holding in his hand drop to the floor.

The smell of smoke was growing stronger by the second. ●

Bela LUGOSI

IN

SHADOW OF CHINATOWN



EPISODE 9

THE LAST WARNING

Anger and frustration gripped McCaffrey. He had always prided himself on his ability to spot a con man. This was more than a con game, though. It involved murder!

The Riburi Hat

by CARL JACOBI

AT 11:30 P.M., AS HE HAD FOR ALMOST FOUR YEARS, JIM McCaffrey left his apartment on the tenth floor and rode the elevator down to the basement garage. There was a cigarette machine next to the elevator. He put in coins and levered out a package of Blue Circles. Then he walked to the nearest bay, entered his four year old Mercury and headed for the street doors. Before he reached them a girl darted down the side walkway and rapped on his car window.

He stopped and pushed the door open.

"I'm one of the tenants," the girl said. "In 612. Are you going near Cressida and Eighteenth?"

McCaffrey disliked pushy dames who tried to gain a favor by means

of a pretty face. And this one had a pretty face. But she smiled and the smile won him over.

"Get in."

They passed through the electric eye beam, the doors opened, and they rolled out into the semi-darkness of the night street. McCaffrey opened the package he had bought, took out a filter tip and lit it with the dash lighter. He glanced at the girl. She had a thin face, heavily lashed eyes and chestnut hair — what he could see of it. She wore an odd-shaped hat with a wide soft brim and a kind of Alpine crown. You didn't see many hats these days. On her it looked good.

"What's at Cressida and Eighteenth?"

"Danny's Place. My roommate works there."

A drop of rain spattered on the windshield. From the distance came a growl of thunder.

"My roommate took her purse all right, but she left the wallet on the dresser," the girl explained. "It's pretty late when she gets out and she needs the money to get home."

"I should think there'd be plenty of guys who would drive her or lend her a few bucks for a cab."

The girl smiled. "You don't know Mona."

More rain hit the windshield. Wetness became visible on the pavement and the street began to shimmer in the glare of the headlights. The girl looked out at the rain and stirred restlessly.

"You," she said. "May I ask where you're headed?"

"I'm not headed anywhere," he said laconically. "I'm just passing time."

"You mean you're driving without a destination?"

"That's it."

"What on earth for?"

"You know a better way to relax?"

She looked at him curiously but she didn't seem surprised. Flare lightning began to appear over the buildings sky line. The thunder grew louder.

After a time the girl spoke again. "If you're coming right back to the apartment," she said, "how about waiting for me while I run and give my roommate her wallet? It'll only take a minute and that way I won't have to take a cab back."

He thought a moment. "Okay, but make it fast."

It was raining hard now. He switched on the wipers. The thunder became a steady cannonade. And suddenly the sky opened up. A

deluge descended on the car. McCaffrey slowed to a crawl. Twenty minutes passed before he drew up under a neon sign that spelled DANNY'S in rain-blurred letters.

Hand on the door handle, the girl hesitated, looked meaningly at McCaffrey's jacket. "I hate to get this dress wet."

The jacket was new and had cost him a hundred and fifty bucks but with a sigh he slipped out of it. The girl mumbled her thanks, draped the coat over her shoulders and dashed up the long walk to the tavern entrance. Watching, McCaffrey saw her disappear inside. While he was still watching, he saw a man carrying a flight bag detach himself from the shadows of the adjacent doorway and follow her. And in that moment when the door opened and shut after him, the girl was visible there, still in the entranceway as if she had been waiting for the newcomer.

A little shadow of suspicion fell over McCaffrey. But then he was alone with the pounding rain and the intermittent flashing of the neon sign. He shrugged and concerned himself with the passing time. His digital watch showed 12:45.

WHEN THE SHOT CAME IT WAS MUFFLED, BUT THERE WAS no mistaking the sound. The tavern door burst open and the girl came out, running. Behind her a faceless man wearing McCaffrey's coat — he had a woman's stocking over his head — circled the car and yanked open the driver door.

"Shove over," he snarled. He pressed something hard against McCaffrey's side. With one hand he jerked the stick shift and swung the car away from the curb. Then he deliberately waited until several men emerged from the tavern, ran to the curb and had a clear view of the rear of the car. Then — and not until then — did he step on the gas. The car shot forward.

As they merged into the line of traffic he pulled the stocking mask from his head. But he still kept the gun against McCaffrey's side. McCaffrey saw a man with a week's growth of beard, unkempt hair, grey at the temples and close set pinched eyes. He wore a work cap.

"Smooth as silk," he said to the girl. "All right, Spider, how much did we get?"

The girl was bent over the flight bag open in her lap. It was filled with bills. When she spoke, her voice was barely audible.

"Why did you shoot him? You didn't have to shoot him."

"It was him or me. And what's mine is mine. And you're mine.

Don't ever forget that, Spider. Now how much did we get?"

"You shouldn't have shot him." The girl began to sob.

The man seemed to realize he could get no further answers from the girl. He drove on in silence through the pouring rain. At Alenoon Avenue he turned east, away from the business district. In the rear vision mirror McCaffrey saw that the turn had put traffic behind them and that no headlights were following. Anger and frustration gripped him. He had always prided himself on his ability to spot a con man. This was more than a con game, but whatever it was he had fallen for it like a greenhorn kid. Now, he guessed, the pair were heading for their own car, left on some deserted street.

He was right about the car. The holdup man swung into a curbless residential street where large expensive houses were set back on wide lawns. Winding lanes rather than streets bisected the area. Halfway down one of those lanes a station wagon suddenly became visible, all but concealed by the low hanging foliage of a willow tree.

"All right, Spider," the man said. "End of the line. You" — he poked the gun cruelly into McCaffrey's midsection — "get out and start walking."

McCaffrey got out of the car and began to pace forward, a step at a time. This is it, he thought. And it was. He had gone a dozen yards when out of the corner of his eye he saw the holdup man suddenly raise his gun hand and bring it sweeping downward. Simultaneously McCaffrey's head seemed to explode. Colored lights flared up in his vision, gave way to a pit of blackness. He felt himself falling

AT TEN O'CLOCK THE NEXT MORNING A THIN, SLIGHTLY stooped man wearing a Rex Harrison hat pressed the buzzer of McCaffrey's tenth floor apartment. He had to press it several times before he got an answer.

"Police. Lieutenant Jamison. Open up."

The lieutenant was holding a badge folder and had one hand in his pocket when McCaffrey opened the door.

"All right," he said, "back up to that table, spread your hands and don't move while I read you your rights."

McCaffrey stood in silence while the detective went through the familiar routine. "You have the right to remain silent. If you choose not to remain silent, anything you say may be held against you. You have the right to be represented by an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you"

When the detective had finished, McCaffrey said, "Just what am I charged with?"

"Would robbery and murder satisfy you?"

"Where and when?"

"Oh come," Jamison said, "we've got you dead to rights, and you know it. Tell me, McCaffrey, how does it feel to kill a man for a few lousy bucks?"

"I suppose there were witnesses? Did any of them see my face?"

A loom of annoyance entered Jamison's face. "Don't think because you were masked you can get by with this."

"Then I wasn't seen?"

Jamison made no reply for a moment. Then he glanced across the room to where a narrow door marked the presence of a closet. With a careful eye on McCaffrey he edged over to it, opened the door and fumbled inside. With an exclamation of triumph he drew out a plaid sports jacket.

"Your face might not have been seen but this jacket was. I doubt if there was another like it in Danny's last night. And, oh, didn't I tell you your car was seen and the license spotted."

"Did any of your witnesses see a girl?"

Jamison shook his head. "No. But so you had an accomplice; we'll get her too."

McCaffrey bit his lip. "Lieutenant," he said, "I had nothing to do with that holdup. Will you listen while I tell you what really happened?"

The detective shrugged. He had the look of a cat that has caught its mouse and now was willing to let it play. He crossed to a cogswell, lowered himself into it and lit a cigar with a kitchen match.

"Go ahead if it'll make you feel any better."

FOR A MOMENT MCCAFFREY STOOD THERE, COLLECTING his thoughts. His fists opened and closed nervously. Then he began. He told of driving the girl to Eighteenth and Cressida — Danny's. He told of the storm, of giving his coat to the girl, of the shot which was his first indication that anything was wrong. He related how the man and the girl had come rushing out of the tavern. "He had a gun on me before I knew what was happening," he said. "The girl had the flight bag. It was crammed with money, and I didn't need a book to tell me what had happened. They drove to where their own car was hidden. Then I got this." McCaffrey pushed back his hair to reveal an ugly,

blood-rimmed welt where he had been pistol-whipped. "I was out a couple of hours," he continued. "When I came to, I barely had strength enough to drive back to my apartment.

"Don't you see, lieutenant," he went on, "the girl was a shill, and I was their patsy. The two of them knew of my police record, and they must have known about my insomnia. They used both to pull off this job."

"I know your record," Jamison said. "Two years at Waupon for breaking and entering. Time off for good behavior. What's your insomnia got to do with it?"

"I can't sleep," McCaffrey said. "Some people drink warm milk. Some count sheep. I drive. Every night at 11:30 I cruise the city streets for an hour. It's the only thing that will relax me. I've been doing this for years."

"Wouldn't it have been simpler for them to pick a car off the street and simply hotwire it?"

"It would," agreed McCaffrey, "but I guess they figured that if they could point the guilt at someone with a police record the odds would be in their favor."

"How old was the girl?"

"About twenty-five."

"And the man?"

"Thirty-eight."

"Anything unusual about them?"

"The girl wore a hat, if that's any help."

"Where did they have their car stashed?"

"On Shady Lane. That's in the Belmonte . . ."

"I know where it is. Make? Year? License?"

"It was a station wagon. The license was plastered with mud."

Jamison chewed his cigar. "I don't know, McCaffrey," he said. "It's pretty thin." He stood up. "Well, we'll make a little trip to the station. Maybe we can find some things there that will clarify your story."

They drove to the Sixth Precinct station on Eighth Avenue. Here McCaffrey found himself treated as both a suspect and a witness. He was given three books of mug shots. None of them had pictures of the holdup pair. He then described the man and the girl to a police sketch artist who made composite drawings. He was told to repeat his story to a stenographer. After that he was finger printed and photographed.

"Now," Jamison said, "the sergeant will give you the details of

what exactly happened at Danny's last night. That is, assuming your story is true and you don't know them already."

The sergeant read from a paper:

The man killed at the tavern was one Ernie Thorpe, the bartender, male, Caucasian, thirty-one. According to the ballistics men he had been shot with a Webley Scott British Naval regulation automatic dating back to World War I. The money taken from the safe amounted to a little more than \$11,000, kept on hand for check cashing, Danny's being in a factory neighborhood. A tidy sum but hardly enough to risk a murder charge. And that was the strange part of it. For Ernie Thorpe had made no move to resist the robbery. The holdup man had turned and fired the fatal shot as he went out the door.

"Okay," Jamison said, after the sergeant had finished. "Now I may be a fool, but I'm going to give you a reprieve. I've got plenty of evidence against you. Remember that. If you don't come up with something to substantiate your story in the next twenty-four hours — by tomorrow night — brother, you're in trouble. Now get out of here."

SURPRISED BY HIS UNEXPECTED FREEDOM, MCCAFFREY returned to his apartment, where he made himself a sandwich and a cup of coffee and took stock of the situation. Frankly he didn't know where to start. The holdup pair might be in the next street or the next state by now. The sandwich finished he went down to the basement garage and got into the Mercury.

For several blocks he drove aimlessly without destination. Then on impulse he headed for the Belmonte district where the pair had changed cars. It was the last place he had seen them and if there were any clues it seemed the logical place to look. Presently he reached Shady Lane. He got out and looked at the wide boulevard that separated the big residential estates from the roadway. He moved across to the tree under which the station wagon had been concealed. He went forward to the approximate place where he had been knocked unconscious, studying the black pavement. After this he went over the neatly clipped grass and the bordering flower beds. Nothing. But then something caught his eye. At the edge of the pavement there was a strip of sandy soil that had been washed down over the tarvia from the flower beds. The strip was still moist from last night's rain, and clearly imprinted in it was the tread mark of a tire. The distinctive mark of a

Remington snow tire. No other tire had a tread like it.

A snow tire in August?

As he had told the lieutenant, his memory of the getaway car was vague. He knew it was a station wagon, not too old, and thought it might be a Buick but wasn't sure. But with this additional tire information he had something to go on.

He headed for Compton Avenue, the street where most of the city's used car lots were located. He went into six lots and drew a blank in each. In the seventh, however, he found a salesman who didn't lose immediate interest when he learned he wasn't dealing for a possible sale.

"Yes, I've sold several wagons recently," the salesman said. "But none of them was a '79 or '80, and none of them was a Buick. The closest I can come to that is a '78 Dodge."

"Did it by any chance have snow tires?"

"As a matter of fact it did. I was surprised that the buyer didn't insist on a change."

"Can you give me his name?"

The salesman consulted a file. "The car was sold to Frank S. Wells, Blossom Heights."

BLOSSOM HEIGHTS WAS A RESORT TOWN OF 5,000 ON HIGHWAY 93, close enough to the city to be sometimes regarded as a suburb. But it was a separate community with a separate government.

McCaffrey drove to the town and went into the post office first. No one named Wells had a box or received mail there. Next he tried the library, the two supermarkets, the two major gas stations, the movie theatre, the pool hall and the motel. He went into the courthouse, in the treasurer's office and looked up land titles. No Wells owned property in the township and none of the citizens had ever heard of him.

"Phony name," muttered McCaffrey. "Phony address. I might have known."

As a last resort he entered the office of the ARGUS, the town's weekly newspaper.

"What was that name again?" the editor asked.

"Frank Wells. Frank Stockton Wells."

The editor shook his head. "No, not in this town."

McCaffrey sighed and turned toward the door.

"But there was a man here a couple of months ago who called himself Stockton."

It was a straw but McCaffrey grasped it. "Where . . . ?"

"He had a room at Mrs. Baggarts. Last house on Oak Street."

Ten minutes later McCaffrey opened the gate of a picket fence and strode up to the door of an old fashioned three storey house. A short buxom woman answered his ring of the bell.

"I'm looking for Mr. Stockton," McCaffrey said.

"He ain't here. He ain't been for two months."

"Did he leave any forwarding address? Do you know where he worked?"

The woman peered at McCaffrey with suspicion. "He could have worked on the moon for all he told me. The only thing he left was some laundry."

McCaffrey decided that the straight truth was now his best bet. So he said, "I'm working with the Minneapolis police. They've been trailing a man involved in a crime in the Twin Cities. His name may not have been Stockton. But the man who roomed here might have known the criminal or left something behind that will lead to him. If he did leave something" — McCaffrey paused to let his words sink in — "there's a good possibility you can get back the rent money he left owing you."

It was a shot in the dark but it worked!

A gleam of avarice entered the woman's eyes. She opened the door wider. "First door on the right at the top of the stairs."

When McCaffrey entered the room he saw a small pile of clothing laid out neatly on the bed. He had no doubt that the landlady had already gone through it. He began to examine it piece by piece. There were several pairs of work trousers, a pair of dress slacks, several chambrey shirts, a dress shirt, a work cap and a jacket. The cap bore a union label that told him nothing and the dress slacks had the name of a Minneapolis men's clothing store which was equally non-informative. The jacket was a pea jacket, U.S. Navy issue.

On the bureau was a bus time-table with departure and arrival times at the Twin Cities, a couple of Mickey Spillane paperbacks and a small leather notebook. He carried the notebook across to the window and rifled through its pages. Only one page, the first, had any writing. In a cramped hand was the following:

I had the whip today. Tomorrow the tunnel.

And then those damned horses.

Downstairs, McCaffrey thanked the landlady. "Tell me," he said, "is there any place near here where they're digging a tunnel?"

"A tunnel?" The woman's brow wrinkled in thought. "I don't think

so."

"Any place where road construction is going on?"

She could answer that. "At county road 10. Ten miles down the Willoughby Road."

He found the Willoughby Road and with mixed emotions drove the ten miles to the construction site. He sat there for a long moment contemplating the scene. A deep pit stretched before him, swarming with workmen. Trucks and bulldozers moved in and out, raising clouds of dust.

With some difficulty he slid down a sandy incline and threaded his way through the confusion until he saw a workman with a yellow flag on his helmet.

"Foreman?"

"Timekeeper."

"You may be just the man I want to see. Ever have a man on your payroll named Wells. Frank Wells?"

"Nope."

"How about a Stockton?"

"Him neither."

McCaffrey tried a different tack. "I don't suppose you could call this project a tunnel?"

The timekeeper stared. "That's right. You couldn't. We're cutting an underpass to join 10 with 57."

McCaffrey had one last shot. "Tell me," he said, "have you ever used horses on this project?"

This time the timekeeper burst out laughing. "The only horses I've seen in ten years have been in western movies."

So the trail ended here. All his efforts to trace the holdup man by way of a station wagon with snow tires had resulted in failure. The road which led him to Blossom Heights had been a blind road.

He returned to his car and headed back for the city.

IT WAS MIDAFTERNOON WHEN HE REACHED EIGHTEENTH and Cressida. Danny's Tavern looked cheap and shoddy in the daylight. The white adobe walls were rust-stained from the pseudo Spanish ornamental iron grillwork. Only the neon sign appeared new as it blinked off and on.

Inside, the place was in shadow with chairs stacked upside down on tables and a single light over the bar. A bald headed man was behind the bar, polishing glasses.

"We're closed."

"I know," McCaffrey said. "But I understand you had some trouble here last night."

"I told everything I know to the other papers and the police. And I wasn't working last night."

"I'm not from the press," McCaffrey said. "Do you have any regular customer who might have been here?"

The bartender thought a moment. "The Colonel's always here," he said. "I guess he hasn't any other place to go."

"The Colonel?"

"His real name is Dunlop. An old guy. Must be in his eighties."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Sure. The Metrapole over on Twentieth. The same fleebag where Ernie lives . . . lived."

McCaffrey stared. "Ernie Thorpe, the man who was shot?"

The bartender nodded.

"Did they both live alone?"

The bartender nodded again. "The Colonel's a widower. His wife's been dead for years. And Ernie was a misogynist." He smiled a little, proud of his word knowledge.

"You mean he was gay?"

"No, he wasn't gay. But he told everyone he didn't like girls."

McCaffrey left the tavern and walked the two blocks to the Metrapole. It was a hotel converted into an apartment complex. The lobby mailboxes listed an Ernest Thorpe in 309 and a Martin Dunlop in 224. He climbed three flights of stairs, went down the third floor corridor and knocked on the door of 309. As he had expected, there was no response. But under the pressure of his knuckles, the door inched open. He glanced guiltily over his shoulder and went in.

The room had the usual components of a third-rate rooming house: a worn sofa, several overstuffed chairs and a couple of scratched tables. On one of those tables were a half dozen girlie magazines. A Playboy centerfold and a September Morn poster hung on the south wall. But it was the north wall that held McCaffrey's attention. It was virtually covered with photographs, snapshots, magazine illustrations, even newspaper clippings. All were of young women in their late twenties or early thirties. All were examples of feminine pulchritude, although some of them were too generous in their proportions to suit McCaffrey. He moved from one to another curiously. Ernie Thorpe was not only not gay or a misogynist. Girls apparently had been his major

interest in life.

But suddenly McCaffrey froze. He was looking at a snapshot of a girl with high cheek bones, heavily lashed eyes and chestnut hair under a broad-brimmed hat. It wasn't a face he was likely to forget.

It was the girl of the holdup!

MCCAFFREY STOOD THERE WHILE A HUNDRED MAD thoughts raced through his mind. Ernie Thorpe, the man who had been killed, with a picture of the girl who had taken part in the crime which had resulted in his death. It didn't make sense.

He tore the picture from the wall and left the apartment. He went down a flight of stairs and knocked on the door of 224. A man with a face like parchment answered his knock.

"Mr. Dunlop?"

The man nodded silently.

"Mr. Dunlop, I understand you were a friend of Ernie Thorpe's and that you were at Danny's Bar last night."

Again the man made no reply, only nodded.

"What can you tell me about the shooting? Did Ernie make any move to stop the holdup, any move that might have led the holdup man to think he had a gun under the bar?"

"Ernie didn't move at all."

"Do you think you would be able to recognize the holdup man if you saw him again?"

"He was masked."

"I know, but aside from that, are there any details you remember that might help in finding him?"

"He had a tattoo on his left wrist."

"What kind of a tattoo?"

"An anchor."

At this point McCaffrey brought out the snapshot he had taken from Ernie Thorpe's wall. "Ever see him with this girl?"

Dunlop opened and closed his fists. "Ernie had a lot of girls," he said. "But he was an all-right guy and . . ." His voice faltered. "You can ask the building manager. He's in 108." He broke off, and it was evident he could talk no more.

The manager was a florid faced man with a bulbous nose. He looked at the snapshot and nodded almost immediately. "Yeah, she was here. A couple of times. I don't interfere in my tenant's business. I remember her though. She wore a Riburi hat."

"A what?"

"That's a hat. I know because my wife bought one just like it."

A mental image of the girl flashed before McCaffrey's inner eye.

"A floppy brimmed thing with a pointed crown?"

"That's it. Can you imagine anyone paying a hundred dollars for a hat?"

The manager said his wife did her shopping occasionally at Delmar's. Delmar's was a woman's specialty store that had been able to ward off chain management by flaunting its off-beat merchandise and trade. Its slanting display windows, modernistic furnishings and aloof personnel all added to this picture. A haughty floor walker directed McCaffrey to the third floor where a sleek elegantly coiffed clerk approached him.

"I'm interested in women's hats," McCaffrey said. "Is it true that hats are not worn much anymore and are going out of fashion?"

The clerk smiled. "On the contrary, hats are definitely in this season. We're featuring a modified version of a cloche which was popular during the twenties."

McCaffrey shook his head. "I had in mind something different. Do you have a hat called a Riburi?"

The clerk nodded and a gleam of interest entered her eyes. "Yes, indeed. A copy of an Italian original."

"Is Delmar's the only city store that carries them?"

"That's right."

"And I don't suppose you keep a record of sales?"

"Only if they're put on charge."

McCaffrey brought out the snapshot. "Do you by any chance recall selling a Riburi to this girl?"

The clerk looked at the photograph a long time. "Yes, I believe I do," she said. "That hat was a natural for her. She had that Katherine Hepburn face, if you know what I mean."

"Was it a cash sale?"

"I'm afraid it was."

McCaffrey sighed. It had been a tenuous thread at best, and he really hadn't expected anything to come of it. He turned toward the elevator.

The clerk stopped him. "You're looking for her. Right? Well, maybe I can help. They're repairing the streets, and some of the bus stops have been temporarily changed. The girl in that picture asked me where she could catch a number 6 bus. I told her. Sixth and Garnet."

A little breath of life swept through McCaffrey. "Do you remember what time she left the store?"

"A little before three. I take my coffee break on the hour."

With a lighter step than he had had all day McCaffrey descended to the main floor and hurried down the street. His watch showed five minutes of three.

ALTHOUGH HE SELDOM USED THE CITY BUSSES, MCCAFFREY was familiar with their routes and schedules. He knew that Number 6 was a long liner that ran each hour on the hour. It crossed town as far as the city limits and then went straight out 93. With a medley of thoughts in his head, McCaffrey waited at Sixth and Garnet. When a Number 6 came, he boarded it and took a seat directly behind the driver. Traffic was heavy. Passengers got off and got on. Not until they were well across town did he find the opportunity he had been waiting for. He leaned forward and held the snapshot before the driver's eyes.

"Do you recognize this passenger?"

The driver snorted. "Are you kidding? I've got enough to do just driving this hack . . ."

"Take another look," McCaffrey persisted.

The driver glanced again. And then his face broke into a smile. "Yeah, I do. She wore a screwy hat . . ."

"Do you remember where she got off?"

"She got off at Wildwood. That's not a scheduled stop anymore since the park closed."

"Wildwood Amusement Park?"

The driver nodded.

"I could kiss you," McCaffrey said and swung off the bus at the next intersection.

He waited impatiently for a return bus to take him back to his parked car. When he reached it, he paused a moment, then crossed the street to a sidewalk phone booth. He dialed the number of the Sixth Precinct Station.

"Lieutenant Jamison," he said when the connection was made.

Five minutes later he was driving fast down Highway 93.

WILDWOOD AMUSEMENT PARK HAD ONCE BEEN ONE OF THE most popular places of entertainment in the state. Tourists from the south, heading for Lake Superior and the north woods stopped for an hour of relaxation. Visitors from the Twin Cities brought picnic

lunches and spent the day enjoying the rides and concessions. And citizens of Brainerd and Grand Rapids driving east were attracted to its promise of rest and relaxation along the lake's sandy shore. The company that owned it also managed a dozen "honeymoon cottages" on the west side of the lake. But gradual lack of patronage had finally forced the closing of both facilities. Two roads led in from 93 — the north road which went by the amusement park and the south road which reached the cottages after circling the lake.

As McCaffrey drove past the boarded-up ticket booths and wired-shut turnstiles, he saw the gaunt frameworks of the roller coaster and the ferris wheel outlined against the afternoon sky. And as he went on he saw through gaps in the surrounding fence other rides that were always a part of such places of entertainment. A carousel with its painted horses, a wheel-like device with tub seats at the end of long radiating spokes, commonly called the whip and a long canvas-covered thing known as the tunnel of love.

McCaffrey gave his attention to the road. It was rutted, full of potholes and in places almost washed away from lack of maintenance and travel. He continued past the park and presently reached the west shore and the cottages. They had weathered to a dismal grey and the once-trim lawns that surrounded them were now fields of weeds and undergrowth. McCaffrey drove past them. No sign of life was visible. Most of the doors and windows were boarded up. He turned about and went by them a second time. As he came abreast of the third cottage, something caught his eye, something he had been half expecting. An unboarded window had only a rag of curtain for covering, but that curtain moved almost unperceptibly.

He got out, mounted the steps of the little porch and knocked on the door. Silence answered him. He knocked again, louder. The door was opened a crevice and eyes peered out at him. Almost instantly the door was shut again.

"Open up!" McCaffrey ordered.

The sound of his voice had barely died away when a car door slammed somewhere in the rear of the cottage. An instant later a station wagon burst out of the side driveway, turned with a squeal of rubber and roared into the north road. McCaffrey had only a fleeting glimpse of its two occupants, but it was enough to see that the driver was a man in a work cap and the other, a girl with a wide-brimmed hat. Then he was in the Mercury, gunning the motor in pursuit.

Down the north road the two cars raced. The station wagon jumped

potholes and skirted washouts in wild abandon. The Mercury fell farther and farther behind.

McCaffrey drove with the realization that his entire future depended upon this chase. If the holdup pair escaped — and he was certain that's who they were — he would have nothing to back up his story of the robbery at Danny's.

They reached the outer limits of the amusement park and here the bordering foliage beyond the fence thinned, giving him a momentary, unobstructed view of Indian Lake. Even as he glanced at it out of the side of his eye he saw on the opposite shore a blue and white car speeding down the south road, parallel with him.

The rough uncared-for road gave way to smoother blacktop, but here a series of sharp bends made driving at this speed even more hazardous. McCaffrey's hands were sweating on the wheel as he toolled around unmarked curves. Twice the Mercury almost met with disaster.

Once again the lake came into view and once again he saw that blue and white car racing along the opposite shore. Even as he watched it disappeared behind a stand of cedars far ahead.

And now as he neared the highway the station wagon driver became even more reckless, apparently sure that once he reached 93 he would be able to elude pursuit in the fast but congested four-lane traffic.

Suddenly a blurred shape came out of nowhere before him. It slewed across the road, twisted broadside and ground to a stop, blocking the way. It was the blue and white car!

Veering to the opposite shoulder the station wagon raced forward along its edge. But the shoulder here was narrow and flanked by a water-filled ditch. The wheels hit mud, spun, seeking traction. In vain the driver sought to regain the pavement. Slowly but surely the station wagon slid backward. For an instant it seemed to hang there like a frozen action replay. Then it turned on its side and plunged into the black water.

MCCAFFREY STOPPED THE MERCURY TWENTY FEET AWAY. As in a dream he saw the familiar figure of Lieutenant Jamison emerge from the blue and white. The two men ran to the shoulder and waded out into the water simultaneously. But it was the police officer who reached the wagon first. He wrenched open the door and helped the two occupants climb out. The girl was ashen-faced but apparently unhurt. The man had a small cut over one eye. Jamison snapped handcuffs on his wrists and prodded him up the embankment where

McCaffrey and the girl joined them a moment later.

The detective surveyed the two a long moment. Then he said to McCaffrey, "It would seem these two have come to the end of their road. And in more ways than one."

THE NEXT DAY JIM MCCAFFREY SAT IN LIEUTENANT JAMISON's office in the Sixth Precinct Station.

"I can understand," McCaffrey was saying, "how Frank Wells' hatred for Ernie Thorpe, which stemmed from his almost insane jealousy for the girl he called Spider, plus his knowledge of my police record and my inability to sleep at times, provided him with the motive and the means for murdering Thorpe."

"But when I phoned you, I was only interested in the girl. I had learned that she got off the bus at Wildwood Amusement Park, which was no longer a scheduled stop, and I suddenly remembered those cottages on the west shore and what a perfect hideout they would make for anyone who wanted to keep away from the law."

"Earlier this afternoon Martin Dunlop had described the holdup man to me as having a tattoo of an anchor. Although this tied in with the Navy jacket I found in Stockton's room, it meant nothing to me then."

"It wasn't until I saw those rides in the amusement park, the whip, the tunnel (of love) and the carousel with its horses that the significance of the words written in Stockton's notebook struck me. Then all at once I knew Stockton and Wells were one and the same person and that he had worked in the amusement park as a maintenance man. And then I knew I was closing in on the double jackpot."

Jamison nodded. "And I reached those cottages only seconds after you. I took the south road back. It was longer, but in better condition and enabled me to head off the holdup pair before they reached 93."

McCaffrey stood to leave. "What will happen to the girl, lieutenant? She had no part in the murder and technically speaking nothing to do with the holdup. She was in the tavern entranceway the entire time."

The detective nodded. "I suppose it will rest on you to press charges." A slight smile crossed his lips as McCaffrey suddenly was silent. "Your lack of enthusiasm wouldn't have anything to do with the fact that she's a girl, would it?"

"I don't think so," McCaffrey said with an answering smile. "But she is the most attractive girl I've seen wearing a hat."

Unlike other restaurant critics, Dennis Notley wasn't bashful in his reviews. As a result, he was the most widely read and feared of his kind. He gave the readers what they wanted, and they loved him for it. The restaurant owners, however, were another matter!

Fed Up

by MICHAEL CHRISTIE

STANDING UNSURELY AT DENNIS NOTLEY'S APARTMENT door was a tall, white-haired, middle-aged man in a gray suit with splatters of rain on the lapels.

The man half smiled and spoke hesitantly. "I'm sorry to bother you," he said uncomfortably and cleared his throat. "I tried to get in touch with you at The Chronicle, but they said you'd left early. Then your line was busy."

In the last half hour, before taking the phone off the hook, Dennis had received three nuisance calls. Two from carpet-cleaners and one from a life insurance salesman. He'd let these intruders on his privacy read their entire pitches then told them to get lost or drop dead. That was enjoyable, but enough was enough. If the man sold vacuums or encyclopedias he wouldn't play cat-and-mouse games. It was five o'clock and almost time to leave by bus for The Sea Horse restaurant at Dundarave pier in West Vancouver.

"What is it?" Dennis said impatiently.

The man looked cautiously past Dennis before he spoke. "First I must be sure I have the right person. You're a younger man than I expected for some reason. You *are* Dennis Notley, the restaurant critic?"

Dennis nodded curtly. "Some say demagogue. The classy ones, that is. Now if you're selling anything —"

The man held up his hands in mock surrender. "Oh, no, to the contrary," he said with alarm. "I came here to invite you to my restaurant."

"An invitation!" This was a surprise. "You've searched *me* out to review your restaurant?"

The man didn't blink an eye. "I'd certainly appreciate it. It would be an honor."

"It would be a first. I haven't been invited to a restaurant since the early days when I was green and far too tolerant. I'm definitely none of the above any more as many a long-faced restaurant owner can tell you. I make no apologies if a restaurant goes into receivership because of me and there've been a few."

Unlike other Vancouver restaurant critics, Dennis Notley wasn't bashful about calling a spade a filthy, stinking shovel, and, as a result, he was one of the most widely read and feared of his kind. Readers' letters indicated clearly that they enjoyed his straight-for-the-jugular criticism, the glib, superior, mocking tone, and he gave them what they wanted. He was their scout and in his daily column, "Dining With Dennis," he was fond of punning and never minced words.

Just ask those two Limey pills. In their plummy voices they'd called him a filthy, rotten beast after his review (completely accurate) of their now defunct establishment:

The Squire and His Lady
Host and Hostess: Stanley and Prunella

If you like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, then this pretentious, gabled house in the Point Grey area is not for you, my dears. The neo-Jacobian dining room features a sweltering fire in the hearth, uninteresting Dickensian prints on the walls, and a large bay window overlooking a crumbling asphalt courtyard and uncut lawn shaded by cedar trees. This could be a pleasant

enough view while contemplating one's past sins over a port if somebody ever decides to clean the bird dung off the pane.

But the quest, of course, was primarily for food, not decor. On with it then and quickly to the gruesome details, darlings. The portions of roast beef were half fat and the cold and small Yorkshire puddings, undeniably born in a muffin tin, were soggy from the juice of the meat. Ghastly, loveys! Simply ghastly! The less said about the sherry trifle the better. The tinny recordings of Roger Whittaker and various instrumental excerpts from "My Fair Lady" coming from a speaker directly over my head ensured my hasty cheery-byes, but not with a tra la la.

Rating: D. Pity.

An invitation was a novelty, and Dennis felt mildly flattered. He glanced at his watch. There was a little time, he supposed, to hear what this ill-at-ease man had to say.

"Come in and have a seat," Dennis said brightly. "I have to admit I'm genuinely curious about a person who invites a well-known bastard like me to a restaurant." He was being facetious, but he knew he wasn't far off the mark. He was tough. "Maybe you're getting me confused with some of the free-loading hacks in this city."

The man shook his head. "Oh, no, I've read *all* your columns," he said emphatically. "They're most compelling and, uh, provocative."

Dennis roared with laughter. "That's a good one! I've never heard anybody describe them as *provocative*."

Certainly not Jean-Claude. Sputtering with rage the former restaurateur screamed that he was a "heepoocret" and a "son of a beetch." How the tiresome pretender had raved. Other critics, many of whom Dennis suspected of collecting payments under the table, wrote superlatives about this French phony while he was candid. Somebody had to shout that the emperor had no clothes and he was just the boy to do it:

Le Chef de Paris

LIC Host Jean-Claude ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The decor of this eccentric establishment is a conglomeration of the most vulgar and tasteless elements of the Edwardian and Victorian periods, which is unnecessary to describe. Suffice it to say that its non-Gallic qualities are relieved, if that's the right word, only by the first class view of the gas station and pharmacy across the traffic-noisy street, unsuccessfully masked by an uninspired, discordant guitarist.

The mixed green salad with a ginger and mint vinaigrette was a lamentable choice. The dressing was more ginger in name than taste, pitifully resulting in a salad tasting much like toothpaste. Another disappointment was the plate of unappetizing Burgundy-style snails smothered with an over-garlicked sauce. Burp! The smoked flesh of the coq au vin was moderately tasty, but this dish did not contain the required Chambertin, which would have enhanced the unremarkable flavor. The cherry cheesecake was a fairly pleasing end to a so-so meal, but sour cherries should have been used on this overly-sweet confection.

Oh, yes! A couple of glaring lapses in style which I must dutifully mention. The drycleaning budget needs to be increased for the tux-coated waiters, and whipped butter on the tables does not pay homage to haute de cuisine to which this restaurant aspires.

Rating: A C minus généreux.

"You have a nice, cosy place here," said the man. He looked carefully around the room, similar to a corporal or sergeant inspecting a barracks, before he sat down in an armchair. "If you had company, I wouldn't have dreamed of intruding. I want you to know that. I'm not a pushy type. I have to apologize for approaching you outside of office hours."

"Forget it." Dennis was still laughing. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, as I said, I'd like you to come to my restaurant. Tonight if it's convenient. I'll also take you there in my car and drive you back. If

that's all right with you of course."

It was a tempting offer that certainly beat taking the bus. The transmission job on his car was going to take another day or two. It was a clunker, but at least it got him where he wanted.

"Be warned," Dennis said with a sly grin, "that if I decide to accept your invitation I don't pull any punches."

"I'm fully aware of that, Mr. Notley. I read your review three or four weeks ago of The Bavarian Gardens. That was one of the more, er, colorful ones."

Again Dennis had to laugh at the man's choice of words. "Yes, that was, as you put it, colorful. The owner, Otto, now thankfully out of the business, called me a red-necked swine and a yellow dog after my assessment of his joint. I didn't think he could read. Anyway, I actually went to his place twice, something I almost never do, and there was no improvement. In these times people should get top value for a dollar. Otto was a ripoff artist and it was my responsibility to tell the readers such."

Dennis fondly remembered that shattering piece:

*The Bavarian Gardens
Mein Host: Otto*

Ninety-nine per cent of all German restaurants in North America do not use veal for their schnitzels because the dish would be too pricey. This loud place on Robson Street with its blasting oomp-pah-pah sounds from a stereo in the kitchen and its overbearing, stentorian owner-manager, Otto von something, is no exception when it comes to false advertising. Pressed meat is pressed meat and the creme de menthe sauce did little to hide this fact when I was there on a previous occasion. But enough of the sordid past.

This time, therefore, I decided to risk the sauerbraten. To accompany it I was urged loudly by mein host to try a glass of his Sonnenwein, which should have been used as the marinade on the tired, dry piece of meat that eyed me starkly from the centre of a large plate. Otto's bottled pride and joy says this ungrateful wretch, was

spoiled by an excess of raw, bitter tannins with a vinosity — the word, 'bouquet,' would be flattering — lingering somewhere between a freshly cleaned hotel bathroom and wet dog fur. The so-called sauerbraten came with overcooked cauliflower topped with a bland cheese sauce. Even though I consumed only half of this shoddy preparation I was still full. A glass of Dornkaat would likely have relieved my discomfort, but: none was available from the limited cellar.

Otto usually positions himself with folded arms by the fountain at the entrance, which is surrounded by a multitude of withering plants, and barks sternly at departing customers — fleeing in my case — in commandant fashion if "you haf enjoyed your meal, yah!" If it is a question rather than a statement then the answer from this never-to-return patron is a firm "Nyet!"

Achtung: Za solid D bordering on za E.

Dennis stared archly down at his visitor anxiously clenching and unclenching his hands. "That Otto jerk couldn't take criticism. Can you?"

"I certainly hope so," the man shot back. A hyper individual, Dennis figured. "After all, that's why I'm here. I'm betting you'll give my restaurant a favourable review."

"Well, you might be betting your life's savings," Dennis said smugly. "I've seen the best this city of almost two thousand restaurants has to offer and my highest recent grade was a C plus. I can't remember the last time I awarded an A. I admit I'm a bit spoiled — it's the nature of the job — but, regardless, I am *not* and don't think I ever have been your average diner."

IN ALMOST A YEAR AT THE POSITION, AFTER HIS PREDECESSOR, John Sansome, simply failed to show up at the office after a decade of producing "Supping With Sansome," he'd gained forty pounds and visited the tailor's twice to have his pants let out. During the last three months alone in sixty different restaurants he'd forked away either in grudging acceptance or haughty disparagement the following cornucopia

pia: Caesar, Greek, Italian, spinach, and hot duckling salads, shark fin and abalone soup, borscht, bourguignon, sole garnished with mussels and shrimp, Lake Superior Whitefish, smoked eel glazed with aspic, Louisiana prawns, sushi wrapped in seaweed, beer-boiled shrimp served in their shells, Newfoundland lobster, scallops in currant sauce, duck with juniper berries, veal steak with tarragon and Chanterell sauce, game hen with olives, pheasant with linguinberries and grape sauce, fettucine with bacon and mushrooms in a cream sauce, marinated artichoke hearts, reindeer filets, rack of spring lamb, sesame chicken balls, Chateaubriand, double-dipped chocolate strawberries, pears in pernod with basil, deep-fried coffee icecream, blueberries in saboyan sauce, banana fritters, vodka poured over passion fruit, white chocolate mousse, strawberry amaretto pie, and a variety of cheese-cake.

Ah, yes, a dirty job, but somebody had to do it.

To be fair, he usually scraped his plate clean, but a course rarely escaped the left-handed compliment or the weary, sarcastic appraisal. He was no rube. His birth place of Powell River with its pizza palaces, spaghetti shacks, and hamburger huts was in the long past. The general news desk that he'd been at for seven long, grinding years was behind him for good. Over night he'd metamorphosized into a witty and discriminating (the readers said so) columnist with a reputation for being difficult to please. Dennis knew he'd be a success because he had a natural talent for bitching. And so the noisettes of lamb were "chewy but moist," the souffle "while not exactly levitating from the plate was acceptable," the bouillabaise was "agreeable, but the belly bones hadn't been removed from the salmon," the crab-stuffed artichoke bottoms were "passable, although the cheddar cheese was a little strong."

Acceptable. Agreeable. Passable. Such mute praise was as far as he went. Let the hacks say a meal was scrumptious, delectable, exquisite. Those words were just not in his vocabulary.

No, *not* your average diner.

"I hope you'll come, Mr. Notley," the man pursued. "I suppose you could say I'm throwing down the gauntlet. Well? What's your decision?"

In his genteel way the man was telling him to put up or shut up. It was easily decided. No big deal. The Sea Horse could be visited tomorrow. "Okay, why the hell not?" Dennis shrugged. Besides, it was too wet a night for taking a bus. ~~It'll only~~ take me a minute to

get changed."

"Please don't go by my suit. I'm an old-fashioned sort. You don't have to dress up. It's come-as-you-are. Your tee-shirt and blue jeans will be most appropriate for the motif."

"Motif?"

"Please don't press me about it. I'd like you to see when you get there so. No offence intended, but I don't want you to have any pre-conceptions."

Dennis already *had* preconceptions with just the mention of the word "motif." Even at this early stage it didn't look good for his visitor. Not good at all. Motif or theme restaurants invariably got the back of his hand. Three of them came to mind immediately. There was Caporale's in which the "menu dell'opera" was divided into titles proceeding from the *preludio* through *primo atto*, *intermezzo*, *secondo atto*, *secondo intermezzo* to the *finale*. Dennis said the meal was not one to sing about. The Pit Stop offered "jump starters," "engine idlers," and "high octane dinners" with "lubricants." Dennis commented that it didn't get out of first gear and one would be advised to fill 'er up elsewhere. Items at the James Joyce were listed in a literary fashion. Salads were "prologues," soups "prefaces," vegetables "asides," small dinners "light comments," big ones "major statements," and desserts "epilogues." Dennis dismissed it with the line that the menu read better than it fed. These superficial places *would* leave themselves open.

THEY TRAVELED OVER THE LIONS GATE BRIDGE AND EAST along Marine Drive until they got to the Deep Cove area. All the time during the forty-minute drive Dennis stared straight ahead and said as little as possible to the man trying to make small talk. His serious critic's face was on. No more laughing it up. Best not to get too friendly with this naive fellow because he would no doubt be puncturing his balloon as he had many others. They were so numerous, he reflected, and they'd taken it so personally. It was merely duty. He had no animosity for them. Okay, he was a natural bitcher, but he was basically a nice guy. Animals liked him, he'd always been kind to his late mother, and he was never late with his damned alimony payments. In sum he considered himself a decent, hard-working professional with high standards.

They drove in uncomfortable silence down a long, black-topped driveway shining from the pelting rain. At the bottom was a large, old

Tudor mansion situated far away from the cluster of cottages, stores, and main dock with its small pleasure boats. A floodlight from the rickety porch showed that the front steps needed painting and the roof was dripping. A howling wind bent the surrounding tall pine trees. A terrible winter night to be away from his warm apartment, he thought, and was angry at himself for getting sucked in to coming to this depressing place.

"Welcome to The Slammer, Mr. Notley," the man announced grandly.

"Did you say The Slammer?"

"Yes, and I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

Dennis glared at him. "We'll see, we'll see," he said ominously.

The Slammer! What next, dear Lord, what next?

The man escorted him into a large, noisy room where there were dozens of customers sitting at wooden picnic benches. The place was dimly lit by naked light bulbs and it was difficult for Dennis to see at first. When his eyes adjusted, though, it pained him to observe that the diners wore Lone-Ranger style masks and drank out of tin cups. This place was a real loser.

"Abominable," he muttered to himself.

Democratically, owner and critic waited to be seated by the cash register. A sign on top of it blared: COUNT YOUR CHANGE CAREFULLY!!! YOU KNOW WHAT WE MEAN!!!

"You've got to be joking!" Dennis said testily.

"I'm sure it won't be long," said the man, ignoring the outburst. "We'll be seated in the main cell block."

"Cell block. Wow!"

"Oh, good. Here's one of the inmates, as we call our waiters, right now."

"Inmates. Double wow!"

A teenager with blond, greasy hair mumbled, "Good evening, warden. Dinner for two?"

Warden! Triple wow!

The youth was unshaven and looked them up and down sullenly. Like Dennis he was casually dressed, and in white letters across his green tank top, back and front, it said: "Ronny The Rat."

They were led to a bench at the far side of the room. As he followed, Dennis noticed there was a small, plastic ball and chain attached to the inmate's ankle. *Who was the criminal mastermind responsible for this atrocious idea? he was going to write UNZ.ORG*

Before they sat down, the scruffy teenager presented Dennis, as an honored guest, with a silver police inspector's badge he insisted he wear on his chest. Dennis adamantly refused. He wasn't going to be a party to such low comedy. "And you can forget the mask too, buddy," said Dennis.

His companion looked disappointed. "It's all part of the fun, Mr. Notley. You see, the customers are undercover cops — that's why they wear the masks — and they give the orders to the inmates."

Dennis groaned. *Was there no end to this mishmash?*

There was more.

By the side of each plate was a cap pistol meant to be used to get the unshaven inmates' attention. Dennis looked around the room and saw several of them bustling around in their sneering fashion in response to the pistols being fired. There was Sam The Safecracker, Tommy The Torch, and Pete The Pickpocket. Dennis shuddered in disbelief as he saw the latter make a loud, snarling show of stealing french fries off a cop's plate nearby.

It was too much to bear. He was about to tell the warden his restaurant needed a lot of work when the "guard" came up to them.

"Care for anything from the bar, gentlemen?" he said with a friendly smile. He was more courteous than Ronny The Rat.

"And just what would you recommend?" Dennis said wearily.

"Well, the Lizzie Borden is very popular."

Dennis turned to the board entitled SLAYERS. He saw to no surprise that a Lizzie Borden was gin and tomato juice which came with a complimentary swizzle stick in the form of a hatchet.

"Too cute for me," Dennis said with a sneer. All the drinks were named after famous criminals: Billy Miner (beer), Al Capone (scotch and soda), Jesse James (rum and coke), Jack The Ripper (rye and ginger ale), John Dillinger (vodka and amaretto). He read no further. He sighed in exasperation. "Do you have wine?"

"Red or white?"

"Surprise me."

"And you, warden?"

"I'll have whatever Mr. Notley's drinking."

Dennis noticed the board entitled CHOW was just as pitiful as the one for drink selections. There was a Dirty Squealer (pork chops), Gutless Coward (chicken livers), On The Lam (rack of), Up The River (poached salmon), In Stir (stew and dumplings), Cell Bars (spaghetti), and an unparenthesized Brick Cheese. Apparently it spoke for itself.

Here was yet another restaurant, he planned on saying in his lead paragraph, which wanted to appeal to all tastes and by trying to attempt too much did nothing well.

He ordered "In Stir" from Charlie The Counterfeiter. The warden chose a "Parolee's Prayer," whatever that was.

"I'm sure nobody can possibly screw up stew and dumplings," Dennis said loudly.

"If you have any complaints, copper, just fire your pistol," said Charlie. "Everybody does."

"My head is already ringing," said Dennis, "and I'm not going to contribute to the racket."

The warden (he'd have to get his name later for the column) said nothing and there was another uncomfortable silence between the two, punctuated only by the sharp cracks of the ear-splitting cap pistols summoning the guards and inmates, as they waited for their meals. The place now had the strong, acrid smell of gunpowder.

TO PASS AWAY THE TIME, DENNIS TOOK OUT HIS NOTEBOOK to make a few observations. On the walls hung black and white photographs of famous prisons alongside various kinds of weapons such as sawed-off shotguns and switch-blade knives. He wrote: "hideous."

A glass mug of red wine was placed in front of him.

"If you need a refill just fire your pistol," said the smiling guard.

"I've already been told that," Dennis snapped.

There would be no "refill." Dennis gagged after taking a sip.

"Have you thought about providing spittoons?" he said icily.

The warden made no reply.

In his notebook Dennis wrote: "This particular breed of plonk would be excellent for unblocking drains."

Next came the soup of the day. "It's included," said Charlie. "If you want extra crackers just —"

"I know, I know." Dennis scowled. "Now please go away."

It was Manhattan clam chowder. He examined it warily before spooning some in his mouth. He swallowed and then analyzed the taste. "Yuck," he said, and wrote the expression in his notebook.

They ate their dinners self-consciously. It was unusual to have the subject of his criticism right by his elbow, but if that's the way the now-subdued man wanted it then so be it. Dennis wasn't easily influenced. He told the truth.

The *unpalatable* truth. Dennis soon pushed the plate away with a

winkle of his nose. He couldn't eat any more. In Stir was something that should be declared illegal. *An appropriate line*, he thought, and wrote the phrase in his notebook.

The warden frowned. "Would you care for some dessert?" he said quietly.

Dennis gave the man a hard look. Some people had to be told bluntly. "No, I've had enough punishment for one night," he said slowly and deliberately. "No pun intended but I couldn't do justice to the dessert. The meal's given me a stomach ache and I'm getting a migraine from these cap pistols."

The warden continued to frown. "I'm sorry you feel that way. You can't find one good thing to say about this place?"

Dennis didn't hesitate. "Not a thing."

"Not even the crackers?"

"Stale."

The warden's face was drawn. "We've never had any complaints before."

"No wonder. Until tonight I'd never heard of The Slammer. You must have had customers with exceedingly low standards. By the way, how long has this wacky place been in operation?"

"Tonight is our first anniversary."

"Amazing!"

"Amazing?"

"Your longevity. As I warned you, I don't pull any punches. I have to say that this is the worst place I've ever patronized. It's an unequivocal E and get out the barf bags. What's your name?"

The warden was red with anger now. Suddenly he stood up, and the whole restaurant became silent. The employees stopped what they were doing and the masked diners turned around in their seats to focus on Dennis.

"Okay, everybody, it's time to take off your masks," shouted the warden.

They took off their masks slowly and Dennis recognized them at once. He gasped as he saw they were all people in the restaurant business whom he'd — well, panned. Studying him with eyes bright with hate were Stanley and Prunella, Jean-Claude, Otto, and Carlo and Giovanna.

Not those two!

He thought about his uncompromising review of their Italian restaurant, which had just gone into receivership. Maybe he could have been

less severe, a little more positive, not quite so — right before his visit he'd mailed a damned alimony cheque, and, therefore in a waspish mood, he was — yes, harsh:

The Pasta Place
Poppa and Momma: Carlo and Giovanna

*You get a rose at-a the door as-a you come-a in.
That's a-nice. After that-a, though, it's-a not-a so
hot. The red and white linen table covers have-a
the stain on-a them. That's-a too bad. You know?
Bottles (they have-a the dust on-a them) stuffed-a
with the candles are the atmosphere. Some-a
people would say that's-a Early Grunge. Hey?
The lasagna came-a from the package and the red
sauce from-a the can. This place it's-a no good.*

Rating: E That's-a right.

“CHEQUE PLEASE,” DENNIS SAID LAMELY TO NOBODY IN particular.

The warden was grim. “Special guests — and you’re the second — never get a cheque. However, we’ll take your wallet and all your personal possessions because you won’t be needing them any more.”

He snapped his fingers and Ronny and Charlie yanked Dennis from his seat.

This was a bit much!

“These are my two sons, Mr. Notley,” said the warden. “The three of us made the trip to Vancouver all the way from Kansas City. Don’t try to struggle. They’re both football players and a tub of lard like you is no match for them. Anyway, you’re considerably outnumbered. At least fifty to one. Impressive how well hated you are, isn’t it?”

It would be a waste of energy to resist, Dennis saw. “What’s going on here?” he said indignantly as the two muscular boys in tank tops smoothly went through his pockets and took off his watch and ring.

The warden smiled, now enjoying the upper hand. “All of us here belong to a recently formed and ultra secret society of restaurant owners that is growing rapidly every day in many cities. I’m the North American president. We each pay a monthly protection fee. A fee to protect us from people like you. There are too many of your kind in the

world. It's expensive being put out of business by parasites. And that is what you are, Mr. Notley. A parasite! You build your success and reputation by putting down other people. People who are just trying to make a living." The crowd cheered. He was getting them stirred up with his speech. "The majority of us work our tails off, and when we go out of business your kind just laugh at us and get fatter." The crowd stood up at this remark and cheered and applauded. "But no more. We knew you'd fail the test, but we wanted to give you a chance because we're fair-minded people. And now the *piece de resistance*. Let's go, boys."

LIKE A COMMOM BUM NOTLEY WAS HUSTLED THE LENGTH OF the restaurant to a steel door at the back. The crowd followed, hooting and laughing. At the front of the hostile pack, Dennis saw with growing fear, was Otto grinning malevolently and Carlo and Giovanna chuckling with insane pleasure between themselves.

The two brutish boys continued to grip Dennis vise-like as the warden opened the heavy-hinged door.

Inside, Dennis saw a room where there were three small cells. In one was a thin, haggard man sitting on a stool and looking down between his legs at the concrete floor. The man slowly looked up with vacant, hollow eyes and stared, uncomprehendingly, through the bars of his cage.

The warden answered the question that zoomed shockingly into Dennis' mind. "Yes, that's your former colleague, John Sansome, who did a disappearing act. He doesn't look well, does he? We've had him in solitary confinement a year today. But we've not treated him too badly because he was charitable on occasion." The warden laughed humorlessly. "We've given him a steady diet of sourdough bread and water — a nice, ironic touch, I think — and there's always somebody around to take care of his other needs."

Dennis tried to kid himself that it could be a terrifying dream brought on by too much M.S.G. Perhaps even a fragment of underdone potato or an undigested bit of cheese. But he knew somehow that it was actually happening.

"You won't get away with it," he said in desperation. "You'll be caught."

"That's just wishful thinking, Mr. Notley, and you know it. We're a tight, well-organized group. Nobody knows you're here and none of our members is going to spill the beans." Stanley and Prunella

gave a hearty laugh at this line. "You, the knowledgeable restaurant critic, hadn't heard about us."

The warden nodded at his sons and they shoved Dennis roughly into the cell next to John Sansome's and locked it.

"Have you all gone crazy?" yelled Dennis.

"We're fighting back in a rational way, Mr. Notley," the warden said calmly. "Fighting back in style, and, of course, for our own amusement. Obviously we could hire muscle to take care of people like you, but we're not crude. If you had one good word to say about The Slammer — just one — you'd be a free man and we would've had to move to another location. But you did nothing but complain, so you have to suffer the consequences. You lost the game. But if it's any consolation — and I'm sure it's not — there are others just like you to follow. There's a particularly obnoxious critic in Seattle we'll be dealing with next. She's always complaining about dirty knives and forks when it's just dishwasher marks. A Japanese chef is flying in for that occasion. Unfortunately you won't see the interesting things this fellow can do with a cleaver. Incredible!"

As raw hate exuded in waves from the gathering, Dennis felt nausea in his throat. His armpits were already drenched with sweat.

He had to know. "How long do you losers expect to keep me here?" The voice that came out of him had the high-pitched tone of a trapped and frightened man on the borderline of hysteria.

"Only a brief time, Mr. Notley," said the warden softly, impassively. "The hanging is at sunrise. But even losers like to think they have style. What would you like for your last meal?"

ON THE DANGERS OF MURDER

If once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing; and from robbing he next comes to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination.

— Thomas De Quincey
(1785-1859)

Medically, he always saw death in terms of convulsions and body upheavals and pathologic breakdowns as, step by step, the body gave up life. And often, this view of dying was too much for him to bear!

A View Of Dying

by JERRY JACOBSON

IT WAS A BIT AFTER ELEVEN A.M. WHEN HAROLD STONESIFER found the alternate state highway that, with faith and trust, promised it would lead to Lake Wilderness. As a boy, it was where he had done a large portion of his swimming and fooling and taking his life on his hands a thousand times down the waterslide that seemed to him a mile long. He was fifty now and four decades of history had passed since the sno-cones and the small victories in the penny arcade and the major defeats at the hands of nameless, older women with golden bodies and skimpy bathing suits for whom he had been born too late. But it still felt good to him to be going back after all these years.

His wife, Sybil, sat beside him. Her nose was a little in the air over this sudden change in their Sunday plans, and Harold could tell she saw no magic in this trip. But then, it wasn't her past into which they were stepping, but his.

"These *roads*," he heard her whine beside him critically, as he watched for signs indicating the turn-off to the lake. "And doesn't anyone come out to trim these willows? How can anyone be expected to see where they're driving?"

The turn-off was six miles beyond a roadside stand which sold fresh fruits and vegetables direct from nearby farms, but the stand was gone. Well, it had been forty years.

"Willows are usually left to weep," he said. "That's the chief feature of their charm."

"And why does the country club have to choose a Sunday to repaint and decorate? It's been years since I've missed a Sunday brunch and a swim and a tennis game. Are they all crazy?"

"The club's board of directors does things pretty much as it sees fit," Harold told her. "You know that."

"The board of *directors*," his wife countered, "is the personal little tyranny of John Bledsoe, who force feeds the other board members anything he pleases and forces them to stomach it."

"John Bledsoe can afford to be tyrannical with the board," said Harold Stonesifer, "because he owns the land on which the country club sits and three-quarters of the town besides. So if he wants to repaint and decorate on a Sunday, he has my blessing."

"That doesn't dismiss the fact that it's still heavyhanded and unfair. And this lake of yours is certainly keeping itself a closely guarded secret."

"It's only another six miles to the turn-off," he told her. "And then another three down to the lake. We'll be there in no time at all."

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN HE MIGHT HAVE USED A LESS
civilized tongue where his wife was concerned, but that time had faded into the past. Theirs had been a marriage born of loneliness, and what in the beginning had seemed a solution to that problem had only been a fog to obscure the new loneliness ahead. Raging against that irony now took too much energy and strength and Stonesifer had never possessed the sharp-edged weapons it took to be a verbal pugilist.

When Harold and Sybil first met, his first wife had been dead nine years. He had loved her very much and the grief of that loss was slow to leave. In the beginning, his work provided a reasonably strong barrier to keep away the pain. He was the chief pathologist for the state's criminal laboratory and his medical expertise was sought constantly by the people in his department. Whenever doubts rose about the cause of one fatal human disease or other, especially if a particular death was felt to have happened under suspicious circumstances, it was his knowledge and opinion that were sought. On the horizons of a good number of these cases lay the possibility of criminal prosecution and those prospects carried with them tremendous responsibilities.

But he knew the human body the way a renowned lexicographer knew the origins and meanings of words. Everything. Its capillary system and its minute network of blood vessels, the complex mass of veins and arteries, every bit of fiber and muscle, and every vital organ. And he knew without fallibility when a foreign substance had been brought to bear to induce any one of a thousand disfunctions that led to

death. He was proud to think that in his twenty-nine years as a pathologist, not a single human had been wrongly accused, tried or convicted of a criminal act where his own pathological examination was involved.

But his work alone had not been enough to bring his life back into proper working order. He quickly recognized he was becoming a recluse with a broken heart, a widower whose wife had meant nearly everything to him and whose loss could not be replaced.

He had been introduced to Sybil at the country club by a friend. She had been widowed six months. Her husband had been the owner of an incredible number of fast-food seafood bars called Blye's Bounty and he had been an amateur hiker and mountaineer. On his final hike, he had paused along a trail at the top of a waterfall and in fit of reckless bravado, stooped to get a drink. He lost his balance and plunged three hundred feet to his death. Stonesifer hadn't known him.

At the outset of their relationship, there was no way for him to tell how many masks Sybil had been wearing. She chided him mildly whenever he displayed extravagance, cautioning him to be more frugal and on many occasions spent her own money instead of his. She had inherited well.

She confessed she liked to travel, but while recognizing that travel was broadening and a socially admirable thing to do, felt it was far too expensive a luxury to indulge while the exchange rates were so unfavorable to American travelers.

She enjoyed good dining, but avowed one could eat simply and well without having to divest oneself of a small fortune to do so. Small, intimate dinner parties where the fare was nourishing but not bacchanalian were more to her liking.

She felt, too, that while nice clothing and jewelry were essential in the social strata to which he had been accustomed, lavish displays of them were tasteless and egocentric. In this department, she had always felt a little went a long way and that more was not always synonymous with better.

Sybil had, of course, been placing all of her best feet forward while hiding what was unattractive from view, but there was no way he could tell that. Everyone strived to make good impressions. But with Sybil, it was a deadly game of calculated deceit.

THEY WERE MARRIED AT THE COUNTRY CLUB AND FOR A while afterward, Stonesifer felt comfortable about being paired again in a social circle where not many were unattached. The tea dances,

the dinner parties, the Sunday brunches — all of these were made more pleasant for him because he was at last in the regular company of the same woman. And it did not bother him, either, that he was not included in the country club's inner circle of its very rich. He was respected for his affability and for the importance of the work he did and for the fact that he did not lose golf balls or throw tennis racquets, or drink to excess. Generally, he was happy to live out the remainder of his life carrying these small virtues and slender achievements. That his small paradise would become troubled was the farthest thought from his mind.

And then one by one, Sybil's masks began to fall away. Despite her sizeable inheritance, Stonesifer began to realize it was his money that was being spent and not her's. The down payment for their new Lotus Europa automobile did not reduce Sybil's solvency by one nickel. Likewise, the English Regency deck chairs for the patio, the porcelain antiques Sybil found irresistably collectible, the exotic plants she wanted thriving in her garden — all of these were fashioned from his checkbook entirely. He talked her out of the Grand Banks 50 yacht, with gold-plated interior fixtures and designer furniture, but it was a near thing.

And unfavorable exchange rates, as it turned out, were not enough to quell Sybil's lust for foreign climes. If Lucerne had been a friend's most recent port-of-call, Swissair tickets were purchased posthaste. If the flocking was to Monaco, Sybil would have them in Paris and onto the overnight Blue Train to Monte Carlo faster than the spots could be toted on a pair of dice. From mud packs in Austria to coffee bars in Greece, if someone she only remotely knew had done it, Sybil was steadfastly not to be outdone. Stonesifer, through it all, collected a stomach ulcer, uncountable passports and a wider variety of foreign currency and coins than there likely was to be found in the World Bank.

And along with the traveling, of course, came the dining, and the continental ritual of the full-course meal reared its glutinous head. Heretofore a sparse diner in his company, Sybil removed her culinary gloves, so to speak, and partook in a two-fisted, exuberant way. Her weight ballooned as across her palate passed game birds and veal and pot roasts cooked in wine and spicy cakes and heavy, Swedish Limpa flavored with brown sugar. She acquired a fondness for pouched salmon and duck with Calvados sauce, as well as a very wide assortment of cream and cheese sauces done in the best French manner. Because she spoke French, not even the language barrier stood in the

roadway towards good eating and beyond. In fact, her weight did not truly balloon. Sybil had always been a vigorous swimmer and was the country club's seniors swimming champion hands-down and she was voracious about "doing her laps" besides, so her weight never really became a burden or an embarrassment to her. Still, newly revealed all-out assault upon food caused Stonesifer considerable embarrassment at table, and at each meal's end when the check was delivered.

In defense of Sybil, her dress did not grow to be extravagant or lavish, the one element of her personality that, in the beginning, wore no mask. True, she could make a beeline for a dress designed by Blass, or Halston, or de la Renta with as much speed as any of her peers; but she did not hunger after Paris originals or fall into the trap of purchasing the one-time-only opera gown. Jewelry, however, was another bit of *haute couture* entirely. Her wrists were a constant maze of the slimmest of bracelets of silver and white gold and she liked the feel of uncut agates on chains dangling from her neck. And time-pieces, of course. Not wrist watches, but timepieces.

"Americans make wrist watches, Harold," she felt. "Europeans make timepieces. It is a question of having a Mercedes 450 SL or a '49 Mercury."

As their marriage wore on, a new suspicion began to take shape in Stonesifer's mind. It had to do with the fact of his late emergence back into the world after such a long period of mourning. During their courtship, could there have been secrets kept about Sybil Galt which might have been devulged merely for the asking? Was it widely known that she was a spendthrift and overly contentious? That she was avaricious and vain and a sore loser at sports? That she could be extremely spiteful and jealous of another's successes and advantages? That, in spite of all her visible qualities, she was in fact the worst possible mate for *any* man? Indeed, he now even harbored doubts that her husband had died in an accidental tumble down the face of a waterfall. Could he have committed suicide? Stonesifer seriously wondered if there had been witnesses.

THE LOTUS EUROPA BUCKLED BENEATH THEM AS HAROLD Stonesifer geared down for a sudden and pronounced dip in the roadway, shocking him back into the present. He had whizzed on his bike down this stretch, pushed it up on his way back home. Sybil was napping. Her mouth was open wide and her body flopped when the Europa shot over the crest's rise. She looked a little bit like a dead

fish on a dock.

In a quarter mile, the roadway flattened once more and the willows thinned their ranks. Three miles more and then Stonesifer came upon the faded billboard depicting a painted lake and a pretty girl flying across it on water skis, her yellow hair billowing in the breeze. The advertising could still be read: *LAKE WILDERNESS! SUN AND FUN AND THE WORLD'S LONGEST WATER-SLIDE! PICNIC GROUNDS WITH STOVES — BOATS TO RENT — OPEN-AIR DANCE PAVILION!* The memories began to swell in Stonesifer's chest, coming in such a surge he could scarcely breathe. On a huge rock just south of the little, overnight cabins, he'd kissed Caroline Kinghammer his first kiss. And on a grassy field near the tennis courts, he'd fouled some older boy's lines leading invisibly to his gas-powered model airplane and the boy had beaten him up. And there was that awful rumor which circulated every summer that some diabolical boy had inserted razor blades in the waterslide and a young girl had been slit open from head to toe. That the boy had never been identified or caught never failed to play tricks with your sanity and courage as you sat at the top of the slide and tried not to think about razor blades as you pushed off. Stonesifer felt close to drowning in the undertow of nostalgia. It was somehow pitiable about that sign, though. And that it had been allowed to fade and grow dilapidated forewarned Stonesifer to expect that all would not be as he remembered it.

The drive down the gravel road to the lake front caused Sybil to begin to rouse.

“God. More of the yellow brick road. Don't these rural people know *anything* about mixing water and cement to make pavement?”

In his youth, this gravel road had been a constant clog of hotrods and motorbikes and bathers, all dragonflies and dust and the din of shouting and laughter. Now, it was as if some summertime prankster had fashioned a false road which led only to a dead end of berry bushes. On the way down it, only three cars passed them.

But the familiar roped parking lots at the end of the road were just as he remembered them. The ropes were strung through bore holes in tree stumps, miraculously making two near-perfect rectangles on either side of the roadway. There were not many cars, perhaps a dozen in each lot. Stonesifer could recall a bygone year when cars were jammed in fender to fender. Seeing it the way it was now only heightened his acute sense of loss.

But it was a fine day and the dragonflies were still making their

endless sorties in the air. The picnic tables and cedar-fed cook stoves were just beyond the parking lot, then the huge bathhouse, then the wide, sandy beach. The diving raft was still anchored where it had been decades ago, but now it was concrete, with a sturdy, steel diving tower in place of the one made of wood Stonesifer had dived from as a boy. The open-air dance pavilion was gone; but the huge, terrifying steel waterslide still loomed to the left, in waist-high water.

Stonesifer got the picnic basket out of the back seat, plus Sybil's unwieldy nightcase filled with creams and lotions and pairs of designer sunglasses and countless chic magazines.

"Harold, you're not asking that we have our picnic in the *public* bathing area."

"Why not? Everyone does."

"Oh, Harold. All that dirty sand and all those monstrous children raising havoc? And by mid-afternoon, it can only get worse. There must be all *sorts* of lovely spots down the beach a ways."

He didn't want this to be a day filled with argument. He was filled with far too many good sensations about returning home to his lake again.

"Yes, being away from the maddening crowd might be better," he agreed.

"And Harold, don't forget the ice chest. It has the wine, bread and cheese in it."

He nodded. He would have to make two trips.

SYBIL LED HIM ROUGHLY TWO HUNDRED YARDS SOUTH OF the public bathing beach, where it narrowed to only a few feet of sand. Stonesifer spread the blanket and Sybil dipped into her nightcase for cocoa butter sun lotion and zinc creams and her magazines. Her skin was sensitive to sunlight and just a few unprotected minutes in the sun's direct rays could turn her red as a lobster.

Stonesifer glanced down the beach. The public area was crowding quickly. Smaller children frolicked in the first forty feet of shallower water. A rope strung on red floats marked the lake's drop-off point and from there it was another thirty yards to the concrete raft. The area between the ropes and the raft was patrolled by a young male lifeguard in a rowboat. He rowed inexpertly, alternately using strokes that were too deep and those which skimmed uselessly across the top of the water. He wore a tattered tee-shirt and an ancient baseball cap. Stonesifer could recall when the lake's lifeguard was something very

like a defender warrior, a tanned and well-muscled no-nonsense young man in red trunks and a red shirt lettered LAKE WILDERNESS in white, with half-moons of lamp black beneath his eyes to deflect the sun's light and a streak of white, zinc oxide cream down the bridge of his nose to keep it from burning. The boy now in the boat looked more like some random, hapless teenager who, on a whim, had swum out to commandeer an empty craft. Stonesifer half-wondered if he could even swim.

Every inch of his wife's exposed skin was glistening with protectant. She was already deep into a magazine, holding it delicately away from her body to keep it from becoming greased. Either that, Stonesifer thought, or her eyesight was growing poor.

"Majorca seems to be where everyone is planning to go this winter. We should do the Palma nightclubs and go to the bullfights. They give Americans the best seats, it says here, so they can get good pictures."

"A bull being taunted and teased and jabbed with spears to make him weak and bewildered," said Stonesifer. "Then, the banderillo enters and jabs some very colorful darts into his back, so the matador can waltz in and ram a sword home into a bull that's three-quarters dead already. Nice pictures, all right."

"Oh, Harold. The bull *has to* die. It's a centuries-old ritual."

Stonesifer closed his eyes lightly in agitation. "No," he said quietly, "the bull *doesn't* have to die. And if he does, I'd rather not be there to watch it."

"Well, then, you have absolutely no sense of history or tradition."

"That may be," he told her. "But I have a *very strong sense* of what constitutes cruelty to dumb animals."

Stonesifer would like to have seen the argument continue to a resolution, but his heart wasn't entirely up to it. He knew too much about medical pathology — and too much about the agonizing way fighting bulls were forced to die. Medically, he always saw death in terms of convulsions and body upheavals and pathologic breakdowns as, step by step, the body gave up life. And often, this view of dying was too much for him to bear.

HIS WIFE READ FOR TWENTY MINUTES MORE AND THEN, removing her jewelry and wrist watch, plunged into the lake for a swim. Stonesifer declined an invitation to join her (he was not a very good swimmer), but watched her from the beach idly. He had to admit

she was a marvelous swimmer, possibly the only trait that now endeared her to him. She was possessed of Olympic-class precision and form. Her body cut through water as though the water wasn't there and could offer no resistance to her flawless style and power. When she finished her swim and returned to shore, it was in an all-out sprint which would have left swimmers half her age in the trailing wake. When she dropped to the blanket and began to towel off her hair, she wasn't a beat out of breath.

"Invigorating, wonderful! Let's have our lunch!"

Their wine was expensive Moselle, as close to imported, vintage white as a wine could get. There was cold, garlic oysters, a pasta pie, three cheeses and French bread. There were a dozen plump, gingered shrimp and a nice batch of herring in sour cream and a bit of leftover salmon loaf. Sybil ate with roughly the same vigor with which she swam, all-out and with mean attack. Stonesifer wasn't all that hungry himself, but then he hadn't been exercising to work up a hefty appetite.

"Harold, I really wish you would give some serious thought to leaving the state's pathology lab and setting up a private practice. You're a good general surgeon and your name is well-known. It just seems to me a pity you should have to limp along on what little the state pays you when larger financial rewards are there merely for the asking."

"Understanding and identifying dysfunction in the human body," he told her, "isn't the same thing as having the knowledge and skill to correct it. And I can't see becoming a wet-behind-the-ears medical school candidate at my age."

"Nonsense, Harold. All you really need is a little brushing-up. I mean, I recognize your job with the state is important and respectful. But as a surgeon with a private practice, you would have the wealth and prestige you rightfully deserve."

Sybil found some smoke-roasted chicken hiding in the bottom of the picnic basket and some Portuguese sweet bread. Stonesifer opened the second bottle of wine.

"I hope the horrid smell of paint is gone from the club by next Thursday's dinner dance. I mean, *painting* in the dead middle of summer. Paint keeps, for goodness sake!"

"A lot of the members are gone on trips and cruises," Stonesifer told her. "Summer doesn't seem like a bad time to paint and decorate, not a bad time at all."

There was some chilled custard for dessert and some pine nuts and coffee from a thermos. The coffee was brewed from fresh ground Turkish, in keeping with Sybil's insistence on being as continental as one could be, an extension of her theory on the vast differences between the Mercedes and the '49 Mercury.

She finished her custard, pine nuts and coffee. Stonesifer watched her pop two antacid tablets into her mouth and then fish her wristwatch up from the blanket to check the time. "I think I'll take a nap, Harold. Will you wake me in an hour?"

"Yes," he told her. "In an hour."

WITH SYBIL ASLEEP NOW AND WITH HIS BEING FILLED WITH A sense of betrayal that the lake had changed so much since his youth, Stonesifer suddenly felt more alone than he had ever felt before in his life. And being so far down the beach from all the high spirits and gaiety and mischief he remembered made him feel now a shunned outsider. He felt a twinge of sadness and humiliation.

He wanted a divorce. But he did not want to face the endless rounds of inquiries and explanations that he knew would inevitably follow. He was a very private man and that much publicity would be more than he could manage. And he knew Sybil would not leave him of her own volition. He might not have turned out to be what she sought in a man and a mate, but he now was a social necessity to her. No, she would fight like an alley cat over a fishhead to keep things the way they were. Most of all, he wanted his dead wife back, but that was wanting a thing he could not have. But what *was* attainable was his freedom. Simply, he wanted to be alone again.

The sun was midway down the western horizon now. It was throwing down glints of diamonds on the lake. Stonesifer could hear the yelps and shouts and laughter as they ran down the lake and into his ears. They felt like slaps on the face.

He read some. Really, he wanted to wander the lakefront and attempt to recapture some of the elusive memories. But so much of it had changed or disappeared, he sensed only heartbreak in store. And so he read and occasionally tried to reconstruct in his mind how the lake had been and let it go at that.

IN TIME, HE DUTIFULLY NUDGED HIS WIFE. SHE WOKE, stretched, yawned and looked at her watch. "An hour already? It seems I've been asleep only a few minutes."

"What?" Stonesifer had not been entirely listening. He'd gone back to his book.

"Never mind. I'm going in for another swim. Are you coming in with me this time, or are you determined to remain beached?"

"No, I think I'll stay with my book," he told her. "It's a pretty nifty little thriller."

"Do as you please, Harold. Let your muscles atrophy. In a few more years, you'll need help even lifting a finger."

She bounced up, tore off and made a spectacular running dive into the lake and came up stroking. She could certainly motor in water and with power as well. He had to give her that much.

Stonesifer had passed into a fresh chapter of his book when the shrieks for help broke out. He stopped his reading and looked up, searching out on the lake for the origin of the painful cries. In a moment, he spotted Sybil. She was about fifty yards directly out from shore, flailing her arms in the water like a wounded duck and screaming at the very top of her lungs. Stonesifer listened closely in a hushed attempt to make out what she was screaming.

A cramp, he thought. Sybil had taken a cramp. Yes, that appeared to be what she was hollering about. Some muscle grouping had frozen up on her, rendering her absolutely helpless in the water.

Cramps were nasty business, Stonesifer thought to himself. In the case of swimmers, a cramp was nearly always the direct result of going into the water far too soon after eating. Pathologically, after eating a meal of any size, the blood of a human left the muscles and tendons temporarily to aid the stomach and intestines in the digestion of food. Human blood did prodigious duty, racing about here and there, according to the brain's bidding. But there simply wasn't enough of it in the human system to be everywhere at once.

This was when exercise was dangerous to a swimmer and very often fatal. Exercise built up toxins in the muscles and their fiber, poisons the blood could easily eliminate if it were there. But blood could not do double-duty. And, of course, the victim's flailing about only produced more and more toxins, cramping a second muscle group and then a third. The victim's panic was the ultimate killer, because the panic was nothing more or less than self-induced poisoning.

As he continued watching, Sybil made one trip under water and came up bellowing for someone to help her. Then, she submerged a second time. This time when she came to the surface, her screams were decidedly weaker, the splashes of water lower and less dramatic.

Her screams had been loud enough in the beginning to attract some attention from the public bathing beach. Stonesifer could make out sunbathers and swimmers halting their activities. Several were pointing and shouting to roughly the spot where Sybil was in the throes of drowning.

The young lifeguard in the rowboat was trying frantically to get his boat turned in the direction of the screams so he could set to rowing, but he was making a terrible job of it. Swimmers were trying to help, but that only resulted in their being batted in the head with oars.

Sybil had gone down for a third time. Stonesifer held his breath and waited for her head to reappear. But it didn't.

The lifeguard was now stroking towards the spot where Sybil had disappeared. But he was easily two hundred yards away and his oars were fighting against one another in a contradicting rhythm. The waters in the area where Sybil had gone under were still and peaceful.

THE POLICE OR WHOEVER INVESTIGATED SYBIL'S DROWNING would want some explanation, or at least some chronological ordering of the events preceding her death. Stonesifer would tell them they had both been napping after their noon meal and his wife had roused herself and had gone into the lake for a swim. But she must have misread her wristwatch, thinking a full hour had passed since her lunch, when in fact, only ten minutes had elapsed. Her screams from the lake had brought him out of his own sleep, but by then it was too late for him to do anything to save her. He was a very poor swimmer himself and it all had happened so quickly. And he, too, would have been risking a fatal cramp, since they had taken their lunch together.

Yes, all in all, a tragic set of circumstances. Stonesifer made a mental note to be a little beside himself and grief-stricken when they came. That would add a nice, dramatic touch, he thought.

He found Sybil's wristwatch near the tangle of jewelry on the blanket. He picked it up and reset the hands backward the fifty minutes he had moved them forward while Sybil had been sleeping. That was another thing he gave her. Her sense of the passage of time was impeccable. She had slept only a few minutes.

When he had the wristwatch reset, he wiped his fingerprints from it and dropped it back onto the blanket.

Then he got to his feet and ran down to the lake.

In the insurance game he'd seen a lot of weird things — but his girl friend insuring her maidenly virtue was going a bit too far!

Dimple Indemnity

by TERRY BLACK

SO I'M NOT AN IDIOT, OKAY? RIGHT AWAY I CAN SEE IT'S going to be one of *those* days, you know the type, where the best you can do is lay in the Bromo and hope you're still solvent when the dust clears.

I don't know which truly started it, the call from Sybil or the surprise visit from the CPA with no armpits. I'll start with the CPA, because he's easier to explain.

"Someone to see you," said Flavia, my girl Friday, poking her head and cleavage into my office. She wrinkled her nose and said, "Weird little guy."

"Thanks, Flavia."

"You're welcome." She paused. "Uh . . . you want me to send him in?"

"That's what we pay you for."

She nodded vigorously and vanished, taking her cleavage with her. I sat back in my La-Z Boy and sighed. The La-Z Boy and Flavia's cleavage were the only things I genuinely liked about my job at the Continental Mutual Insurance Agency. I think J.B. knew that when he hired me. He wasn't the type to miss a bet — especially a cheap one.

"Good morning," said the weird little guy, stepping into my office.

"Howdy." I stood up to shake his hand. He was remarkably short and impossibly fat, with a barely visible mustache and a suit that was probably the height of fashion in prohibition-era Chicago. The suit had no armpits; I pictured an army of moths in a mildewed closet, chomping the wool like rug-rats at a 31 Flavors.

"I didn't get your name," I said pointedly.

"It's not important," he said back.

I bridged my fingers with a professional air. "Here at Continental," I began, "we feel trust is important. Especially the bond of trust between client and insurer. I'm sure you understand, Mister . . ."

"Hitler," he said nervously, "Bob Hitler. No relation to, uh . . ." He cleared his throat.

"Pleased to meet you," I said, shaking his hand. His palm was moist to the touch. "My name's Drexler, Marv Drexler. I'm acting manager of the Claims Department." I sat down and threw him a smile. "How can I help you?"

"You owe me a million dollars," he said.

I HAVE TO ADMIT, IT STOPPED ME FOR A MOMENT. I DOUBLE-taked at him, looking not the least bit professional, and the ensuing silence would have been even more oppressive if the phone hadn't rung at that instant.

"Drexler speaking," I said, welcoming the distraction.

"You have a call from Sybil," said Flavia.

"Tell her I can't —"

"Marv?" Sybil's voice was soft, intimate, and ripe with erotic desire. It startled me to hear it, since it had been less than half an hour since she'd called last.

"Sybil, I've told you never to call me here," I said. Her next line was, 'But I miss you, honey.' Mine was, 'Well, miss me on your own time.' Hers was, 'Don't you love me any more?' After that things would go rapidly downhill.

But not this time. "I have to talk to you, right away," she said.

"Can't," I said, glancing at my watch. "I've got a client."

"It's about business," she insisted. "I want to insure something."

"I'll connect you with one of our salesmen. Later, Syb." I stabbed a button, bum's-rushing her off the line, and turned back to the fat guy. "You were saying . . . ?"

"Ah, yes. About the million dollars." He unzipped a folio tucked under his elbow and extracted a stack of ominous-looking documents. "I'm a certified public accountant by trade, Mr. Drexler. Recently I was retained by the South American republic of San Pescadore." He raised an eyebrow. "You've heard of them, I trust . . . ?"

I rifled my mental Rolodex until the right card popped up. I didn't much like what it said. "Ah, yes, San Pescadore. Of course, I'm not totally familiar with —"

"I'll refresh your memory." Hitler held up a forefinger. "In 1973 the coalition government of San Pescadore struck a deal with Continental Mutual, whereby the government was insured against violent overthrow according to the terms of a special contract. This contract." He

thrust a Xerox in my direction. "Do you read the newspapers, Mr. Drexler?"

"Only the funnies and the movie section, why?"

He reached into his folio again — the thing seemed to have no bottom — and produced a dogeared copy of last Sunday's LA Times, folded back to reveal a boxed item at the top of Page 4. The headline read, SAN PESCADORE GOES BELLY-UP. The story described how the ruling class of this postage-stamp republic had been toppled from power by a provisional military junta.

"Precisely what my client is insured against," said Hitler. He sat back in his chair with a sigh. "Make your check payable to Hitler, Robert A. I am their licensed representative." He showed me a certificate to prove it.

I smoothed the document with both hands, playing for time. This was the sort of problem J.B. had nightmares about, and it wouldn't help his insomnia to see how carefully the terms of the agreement were specified. The erstwhile rulers of San Pescadore had known exactly what to expect, and had committed it to writing with a foresight that would have done Jeanne Dixon proud.

I could practically see those million smackers, making a bee-line for the door marked EXIT . . .

"Flavia," I said, stabbing the intercom, "bring us some coffee, would you?"

"But you don't drink cof —"

"Thanks." I turned back to Hitler, tapping a finger on my chair arm. "Of course, we'll have to send a team of adjusters down to assess the political climate before we, uh, commit ourselves to payment."

"I don't think so," said Hitler. "According to the agreement —"

He broke off as Flavia bounced in with a Sterling silver tray and coffee service for two. For a moment I thought the coffee would make its home on Hitler's lap, but somehow Flavia flounced her way around him until she reached the safe ground of my desktop.

"Cream?" she said, bending over to get it. I gave her the high sign and she bent in Hitler's direction, favoring him with a breathtaking view of her well-formed etceteras. While he busily pretended not to notice I scanned the contract, seeking an out.

Maybe, just maybe . . .

PRESENTLY FLAVIA FINISHED UP AND FLOUNCED BACK OUT again. Hitler sipped his coffee and said, "Don't trouble with your

adjusters. One of the stipulations of the contract is that verification is not required. As soon as anyone other than my employers declare themselves rulers of San Pescadore — as reported in the reliable news media — our claim comes due.” He flipped a few pages. “Section Five, paragraph seven.”

I read the indicated paragraph. “That’s what it says,” I agreed.

“So . . .” He held out his hand, palm up. “Your check, please.”

“Forget it,” I said.

He smiled. “You have no choice, Mr. Drexler. Refusal to make good will only result in costly court proceedings, which — incidentally — Continental Mutual pays for. Paragraph Nine.”

“You’re forgetting something,” I said, savoring it for a moment.

“What’s that?”

I tried to say it gently: “Your client doesn’t exist.”

“Hogwash! I talked to him this morning. The Generalissimo will take exception to —”

“Let him. Your client isn’t the Generalissimo, or El Presidente, or anyone else. Your client is the coalition government of San Pescadore — and by your own admission, it doesn’t exist.”

“Of course not, imbecile!” He leapt to his feet, an act that made him no perceptibly taller. “The coalition government was overthrown last week! That’s the reason for our claim!”

“Fine. And we’ll be happy to pay it — as soon as you show us a coalition government to pay it to. Of course, you don’t have one unless they regroup and take control again —” I shrugged my shoulders “— in which case the claim will no longer be valid. It’s only valid if your client doesn’t exist.”

“But if they don’t exist, how can they collect the money?”

I shrugged again. “They should have thought of that before they signed the contract.”

His features turned beet red. “You have not heard the last of this,” he spluttered, snatching up his papers and stuffing them back in his folio. “Mark my words, Mr. Drexler — San Pescadore is not a country to be trifled with.”

I shrugged. “There go my vacation plans. Don’t slam the door on your way out.”

Do you think he listened to me? Nah.

WHEN I GOT BACK FROM LUNCH THERE WERE NINE MESSAGES taped to the seat of the La-A Boy. Eight were phone calls from

Sybil, each demanding that I answer the last one. The ninth was a hand-written note from J.B. himself. I'll give him this: he's got a flair for understatement.

MARV, the note read, WE'VE GOT A PROBLEM. He didn't have to add, "See me."

"What is it, boss?" I said, marching into his office. The Old Man was seated in an immense overstuffed chair, facing a plate glass window with a panoramic view of a laundromat and a Thrifty drug-store. He swiveled to face me.

"You've been a bad person," he said.

"If it's about the San Pescadore thing —"

"It's not." J.B. planted both elbows on his desk and leaned forward. He was bearded and rotund, with Bacchanalian features and a demonic smile. "Actually, that affair you handled rather well. Do you know what Hitler's cronies planned to do with the money?"

"No idea," I said, straddling a chair.

"Counterrevolution," he explained. "Generalissimo What's-His-Name wants to fund his band of loyalists to usurp the usurpers. Continental Mutual was to be their meal ticket back into power."

"But . . . once they were reinstated, the claim would be void. They'd have to give back the money."

"Sure. They'd be sitting pretty in their picture-postcard kingdom, patting each other's backs, and we'd just walk in and ask for a refund?" He shuddered. "You find a collection agency can pull *that* off, I want to meet them."

"So I did right to dodge it?"

"You did fine, my boy." He yanked open a desk drawer and pulled out two wine glasses and a Thermos. "Scotch?"

"Thanks. But, uh . . ." I took a deep breath ". . . you mentioned some other problem?"

"Yes, I did." He sipped his drink, choosing his words carefully. "It's about that big-busted blonde of yours, Sylvia —"

"Sybil."

"Whatever. I heard she called you this morning and you passed her off to a salesman. Young Hawthorpe, if I'm not mistaken."

"Yes, sir. She wanted to insure something."

"Wanted to, and did. Unfortunately, Hawthorpe suffered one of his not-infrequent mental lapses and insured the commodity in question for quite a bit more than we care to spend." He paused. "About a million bucks more."

I ran a finger under my collar and swallowed. "What, uh —" I cleared my throat and tried again "— what was the commodity in question?"

J.B. faltered, groping for words. It was the first and only time I've ever seen him do that. "Putting it simply," he began, "Sylvia wants to get married. In fact, she wants it so badly that she's willing to insure any, shall we say, personal assets that might help her pull it off."

"Such as what?"

"Oh, most anything," he admitted, ticking them off on his fingers. "Her figure. Her bustline. Her good looks, down to the last dimple. Hawthorpe was an idiot to write a contract so vague."

"Well, can't we back out of the deal?"

"Nope — Hawthorpe met her at a coffeeshop, gave her the contract and accepted her check. As of this moment, the agreement is binding."

I emptied my glass without tasting it, and motioned for another. "What if she goes on a food binge, and gains a hundred pounds?"

"Oh, that's no problem," the Old Man confided. "Anything she does on purpose nullifies the contract — just as suicide will nullify a life insurance policy. That's not the trouble."

"What is?"

J.B. opened his mouth and closed it again. "Perhaps I've got an overwrought imagination," he said carefully, "but there's one possibility I must explore. Have you ever —" he licked his lips "gone to bed with her?"

I stood up with a snort of indignation. "That's none of your damn —"

"Please, Marv, nothing personal. But I must know. Have you ever gone to bed with her?"

Something flicked on in my cortex just then, and I began to see what he was getting at. "No," I admitted. "She's saving herself for —" My jaw flew open and my eyebrows shot straight up. I tottered for a moment, legs like rubber, and came down hard on my seat.

"She insured her virginity," I blurted. "For a million dollars!"

"That's right," said J.B., nodding slowly. "I hope we can count on your discretion . . . ?"

THAT VERY NIGHT I HAD A DATE WITH SYBIL. IT WAS strained, to say the least.

Not that she wasn't doing her best. We had dinner atop the Westin Bonaventure in their beautiful revolving restaurant, admiring the city's best profile from the plush comfort of their thirty-fifth-story lounge.

The dinner was a feast for kings: Korean salad, apricot liqueur, New York strip broiled just right, mint juleps, chocolate mousse and a surprise from the maitre 'd in a bottle marked vintage 1800 and something. Sybil paid for everything with a single check.

"My treat," she insisted. "Because you're something special."

"Uh, thanks," I said, sweating a little. I was oddly light-headed as we rode the chrome-and-glass elevator down to the lobby and made our way to the parking level. I tried not to look at her, but I honestly couldn't help myself.

Sybil was wearing a dress that was probably illegal in most parts of the country. The slightest gust of wind gave a startling view of her well-turned thighs, and her breasts threatened to burst their fragile bonds at any moment.

"Like to come up to my place?" she asked, as we drove up Wilshire Boulevard.

"It's late," I said lamely, glancing at my watch. "Maybe I'd better just —"

"Come on, Marv. Just for a minute." She laid a hand on my forearm, and I felt my self-control wobbling like a gyro. "For me?"

I couldn't refuse. My head was throbbing, my hands were unaccountably warm, and I had to blink to stay alert enough to drive. Sybil leaned against me on the car seat, resting her personal assets against mine with a soft, contented sigh.

At last we came to her place. At Sybil's insistence I walked her upstairs and came in — but just for a moment — to sit on a straight-back chair. She offered me two fingers of brandy and I couldn't find my tongue to refuse.

It was getting harder and harder to concentrate. Nothing made much sense. I saw a notepad resting on her coffeetable with the scribbled message, CALL FURRIER FOR PERSSCRIPTION. That's wrong, I thought — you might as well call the drugstore for a mink.

I looked back to check the writing and found I couldn't read it anymore.

Like I said, I'm not an idiot. Warning bells were going off in my head like landmines. I opened my mouth to tell Sybil I was on to her but the words were so complicated, so hard to pronounce, that I decided it

was easier to just lean back and rest for a while

AND WHAT A DREAM I HAD! I WAS BACK IN HIGH SCHOOL with Betty-Joe Bobolinski, head cheerleader and captain of the swim team, and we were under the old bleachers reading the Kama Sutra and trying anything that looked interesting. Some of the things we did would have shocked Lady Chatterley.

Finally I was spent with exhaustion, drunk with delight, and I started to thank her but she wasn't smiling anymore, she was laughing, and it was a nasty laugh indeed.

I drew back to look at her —

— and came suddenly, horribly awake.

"Thanks a million, Bright Boy," said Sybil. Her upper lip was twisted in a sneer.

"Sybil," I blurted, "did you — I mean, did we —"

She got up out of bed, wrapping a sheet around herself, nodded fiendishly. "You can go now," she said. "I've got what I wanted."

"Sybil — listen to me, if it's that insurance thing — the claim's not valid. It has to be something you didn't do on purpose. This was —"

"— a repulsive experience," she said theatrically, pressing her hand to her forehead. "Imagine my despair when I discovered you had come up here only to rob me of my virtue. Good thing I insured it first."

"It's your word against mine!"

"And who do you suppose they'll believe? The fast-talking shyster insurance man, or the virgin tainted by his abuse? If you know juries like I know juries, the outcome should be pretty obvious."

"Sybil," I said, thinking furiously, "can't we talk about this?"

She spun around fast and said, "No." In her hand was a snub-nosed .38. She said, "Hit the road, Marv," and I hastily reached for my pants.

"YOU DID *WHAT*?" J.B. THUNDERED. HIS VOICE COULD FRY eggs at thirty paces. All day long I'd been dreading this encounter, but I didn't get up the nerve to confront him until late afternoon. Near quitting time.

"I . . . uh . . . violated her contract?" I repeated. "In more ways than one."

"Even after my warning? What do you use for brains, Marv, cole-slaw?"

"It wasn't my fault," I insisted. "She had the whole script worked out in advance. I just sort of blundered through it."

J.B. leaned against the plate glass window, studying the laundromat, sighing. "You told me she was an imbecile," he said slowly. "You said her IQ fell short of double digits. And now you tell me this walking vegetable got the better of one of Continental Mutual's top agents?"

"She must have had help," I said. Something was nagging at me, something at the back of my mind. I couldn't seem to shake it loose, though. "Someone must have doped it out for her."

"The same someone who drugged you, I suppose?"

"No, she did that. It wouldn't have been hard. All she needed was the prescription —"

There it was. CALL FURRIER FOR PERSSCRIPTION. With a burst of insight I knew exactly what had happened. "I can explain everything," I said.

J.B. was unimpressed. "Will it help us keep the money?"

"No, but it sheds some light on things." I told him about Sybil's note, misspelling and all. "She called this guy to doctor a prescription for whatever put me out last night."

"Brilliant. Who? And don't tell me the furrier, that could be almost anyone."

"Not the furrier," I explained. "Remember, Sybil's spelling was dreadful. She couldn't write four words without misspelling two of them. She couldn't even spell the nickname of her new accomplice. She wrote 'furrier' when she meant 'fuehrer'."

J.B. snapped his fingers. "Bob Hitler! Dollars to doughboys he goes by the title of his infamous namesake. The whole scheme was his idea, right from the start — and your little tryst helps finance a revolution in San Pescadore."

"Good God." I hung my shoulders and made a sour face. "Guess I loused it all to hell this time. You want a resignation?"

I waited for him to say "Don't be silly." He'd said it before lots of times. When he didn't say it now I looked up in alarm; he was studying me closely, weighing the possibilities. Fortunately he never had to decide.

"Excuse me," said Flavia, bursting into the office.

"Not now," said J.B. irritably. "We're right in the middle of —"

"Won't take but a moment." She pulled a folder from her armpit and plopped it down on his desk. "This week's bad checks," she

explained, spreading them on the desk before him. "How should I handle 'em?"

"The usual," he said absently. "Write a bunch of nasty letters and apologize to the bank. Now, about this resignation —"

"Hold up a second," I said, raising a hand. "One of these looks familiar."

It was true. Midway through the pile was a designer check, protruding from the side. The name on it was SYBIL GLEASON and the address was the apartment I'd visited last night.

"Her check bounced," I said, not quite believing it. Then, with sudden exhilaration: "Her check bounced!" I grabbed the envelope, kissed it, grabbed Flavia, kissed her too, and was on the point of kissing J.B. when he seized my shoulder and snapped, "What are you jabbering about?"

"Don't you see? It was that meal at the Bonaventure last night! She paid for it with a personal check — and bankrupted the same account her premium is paid from! Failure to pay it voids the agreement — that's in the contract — so we get to keep our million, Hitler goes back to private practice and San Pescadore can do without their damn coalition government! It's beautiful, J.B., almost like poetry."

He thought a minute, eyes narrowed, working through all the angles. Gradually a smile formed on those Bacchanalian lips. "By God, Marv, you've done it again! I don't know how you manage it every time — but we're back in business, and Continental Mutual is glad to have you aboard!"

"How about a raise?"

"Forget it. But this calls for a toast. You, too, Flavia." He pulled three glasses from his desk drawer and filled them from his Thermos. "To women," he began, and I remembered what an ardent chauvinist he was.

"You can't live with them, or without them," he went on. "They wreck your health, ruin your sleep, make your life a shambles — and those are the nice ones."

He downed his glass and heaved it into the waste can. Flavia started drinking, thought better of it and stopped in mid-gulp. I hesitated, donned my old what-the-hell expression and followed J.B.'s example. After all, good Scotch is good Scotch.

Same for a good woman, I suppose. Not that Sybil was any example.

When the president of a bank hands you a foolproof plan and asks you to hold up his own bank, what can go wrong?

The Setup

by GENE DeWEESE

NORMALLY, NONE OF THE THREE OF US WOULD'VE EVEN considered a deal like the one this Hogan guy was offering, but, then, things weren't all that normal at the time, at least not for me. For one thing, my unemployment checks had just run out, and even Madge hadn't been able to find a job. For another, it seemed like such a no-risk setup.

I mean, when the president of a bank hands you a foolproof plan and asks you to hold up his own bank, what can go wrong? He even guaranteed no one would get hurt. "Don't even load your guns," he said. "My employees all have standing instructions to offer no resistance in situations such as that. Believe me, there won't be any problems."

Not that Hogan was all that great a humanitarian. I figured he just didn't want the robbery to attract any more attention than absolutely necessary. Police tended to dig deeper into shootings or killings than they did into plain old robberies, and Hogan most likely couldn't afford

any really deep digging. From the way the deal was set up — he got a 25% kickback and we thieves promised not to write any letters to the editor when the local paper reported that the amount stolen was roughly twice what we would actually get — it was pretty obvious that Hogan had had his own hand in the till and he wanted the robbery to cover his tracks.

I'd seen Hogan hanging around the unemployment and welfare lines the last three or four weeks, listening and occasionally striking up conversations, and then one day he took me and a couple guys named Hank and Phil off to one side one at a time and made his pitch. We all three had our reservations, but we were all in the same leaky boat and figured we just couldn't afford to pass up the opportunity. We were probably kidding ourselves right and left, but that's the way it was, and when Hogan came by for another chat the next week, we signed on, so to speak.

A few days later, I told Madge and the kids I'd gotten a tip about a job out of town and that it'd take me a couple of days to check it out. That afternoon, the three of us drove the hundred miles to Walkerville, where Hogan's bank was the mainstay of the community. Arriving separately, we got rooms at the old-fashioned boarding house Hogan had told us to go to. It was right across the street from his bank, but that was only one of the reasons he wanted us to stay there. The main reason was the popularity of the huge supper that the owner, a sixtyish widow by the name of Martha Wingate, served every evening, not only to her boarders but to anyone else who cared to drop in.

On this particular evening, Hogan himself planned to drop in so that, if push eventually came to shove, he could say that he had gotten a good look at us the evening before the robbery and that we were "definitely *not* the robbers." This was just in case some eagle-eyed teller thought he recognized Hank and Phil through the stockings they would be wearing over their heads.

I BEGAN TO HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THIS PARTICULAR PART OF Hogan's plan, however, when the small, balding man sitting next to Mrs. Wingate at supper turned out to be one of the eagle-eyed tellers. His name was Harvey Spencer, and he was getting at least as good a look at us as Hogan would. Assuming Hogan showed up to look, that is. We were already into the first course and he was nowhere in sight.

"You'll like it here at Martha's, particularly the food," Mr. Spencer said after he introduced himself and pointed his shy smile and blue

eyes straight at Phil and Hank and me, the only newcomers at the table. "You won't find it's like at any of those tacky fast food establishments, nor even, I daresay, in your expensive city restaurants. And I should know. I've boarded here for almost five years."

From the tone of his voice and the way he looked sideways at Mrs. Wingate, I guessed there was more than a landlady-tenant relationship between them, although I didn't think much about it at the time. I was too busy wondering where Hogan was and what he had been thinking of, putting us here, right under the nose of one of his tellers.

But then Mrs. Wingate took over and started talking at me. "I've always been interested in travel," she said a little wistfully. From the glances the other diners gave each other, I assumed this was the standard topic for new boarders. "My late husband and I often discussed it, but I fear we never acted on our discussions. And now, having to run this establishment since dear James passed away, I have never found the time to indulge myself." She signed. "Not that I would wish to travel continuously, you understand, just for brief spans now and again. After all, here is where my roots are. And my friends." Her eyes went to Mr. Spencer, who returned the look with obvious affection, and virtually everyone else around the table smiled understandably even if they had heard it all a dozen times before.

"Incidentally, Harve," a burly man at the end of the table called out, "how's my tv set coming along? There's a game coming up next weekend I don't want to miss."

Mr. Spencer shook his head. "I'm sorry, John, but it's not finished yet. I've been busy with problems around here. You know how it is with a building as old as this one. But I'll have it for you by the weekend, I promise."

"When he isn't at the bank, Mr Spencer is quite the handyman," Mrs. Wingate said, explaining to the three of us what everyone else around the table already knew. "He takes care of everything, from our plumbing to our televisions."

"And one of these days," Mr. Spencer added, his soft voice almost like a continuation of Mrs. Wingate's, "that's *all* I'll have to do. I have almost decided to take Martha's advice and ask for early retirement at the bank." He gave a self-conscious laugh. "Of course I may have to charge a bit more for my services then. Just to make ends meet, you know."

A number of the diners raised their hands in a brief spattering of applause. "Way to go, Harv!" said the man who had asked about his

tv set. "We got plenty of stuff for you to work on whenever you have the time. The way things are these days, it'll be a bargain, whatever you charge."

Others nodded their agreement, and Mr. Spencer smiled at them. "Why, thank you. Your support means a great deal to me."

MR. SPENCER AND MRS. WINGATE WERE STILL EXCHANGING affectionate glances when the door to the combination lobby and living room opened and a middle-aged, round-faced man stuck his head through. It was Hogan, the bank president, and I breathed a sigh of relief. I'd been wondering if he was going to show up at all.

"Are we too late, Martha? Is all the food gone?" Hogan's toothy smile, hairline mustache, and loud voice reminded me of a used car salesman I'd seen once on tv, and I realized that, even if we were robbing his bank for him, I didn't like him. And from the looks of the others around the table, the feeling was shared. He'd been a little oily when he recruited us at the welfare office, but not this bad. He held the door open and stepped back to allow a woman a few years younger to enter. Her fur stole and slightly overweight body went right along with Hogan's manner.

"You and your sweet wife are always welcome," Mrs. Wingate said, smiling.

"Even on the day before the mortgage payment is due?" Hogan said, laughing heartily. He didn't slap anyone on the back, but he looked as if he were going to start any second. He glanced around the table, his eyes passing lightly over Hank and Phil and me.

Hogan took the stole from his wife's shoulders. "Here, Cora, I'll take care of that," he said, hanging it casually on a coat rack near the door. Then he pulled back an empty chair for her with a flourish.

"Three new faces, I see," he said loudly. "Aren't you going to introduce them, Martha?"

Martha did, managing to keep her smile in place the entire time. I'm afraid I wasn't quite so successful.

That night, after everyone went to bed, Hank and Phil sneaked into my room so we could talk things over. Like me, they were both nervous about Mr. Spencer and not all that thrilled about Hogan himself. We were even thinking about backing out altogether, but in the end I gave Hogan a call at his house.

From the way he grabbed the phone on the first ring and sounded very wide awake for ~~one a.m.~~, I figured he was as nervous as we were.

But after angrily telling me what an idiot I was for calling him and how lucky I was that he'd gotten to the phone before it had awakened Cora, he assured me that Mr. Spencer was nothing to worry about. "That little pipsqueak will do whatever I tell him," he said derisively and then hung up.

SO, DESPITE EVERYTHING, WE WENT AHEAD WITH THE JOB as planned. And it went just as smoothly as Hogan had predicted. Phil and Hank had no trouble hotwiring the car Hogan had told us about, and, as promised, the owner, who worked nights and slept days, didn't even miss it. They had even less trouble in the bank. They were out in less than five minutes and had returned the borrowed car in five more. And I, who had been across the street in the company of a dozen witnesses during the excitement, retrieved the money, masks and jackets from the trash dumpster Phil and Hank had dumped them in before jumping into the car and tearing off. No one paid me the least bit of attention when I stuffed the masks and jackets, now wadded up in a grocery sack, into a trash can in a shopping center at the edge of town. Within an hour, I was back at the boarding house, stacking the money neatly in a briefcase and slipping it into my closet.

It wasn't until that evening, when Hogan stealthily joined us in the room for the division of wealth, that the smooth job suddenly turned lumpy.

When I took the briefcase out of the closet, it was empty.

When Hogan saw that, he looked like he was going to have a heart attack. Then he got angry, accusing us of doublecrossing him, and the three of us returned the favor. We had been going on like that, hissing accusations at each other, for maybe five minutes when I heard the door being unlocked. A second later it opened, and Mr. Spencer stepped quietly into the room.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said, glancing at our flabbergasted faces. "Are you having a nice little discussion about the robbery?"

Hogan was the first to recover his voice. "It's none of your daimned business, Spencer! You just clear out of here or you won't have a job come Monday."

"Oh, that's quite all right, Mr. Hogan," he said. "In fact, as I mentioned only last night, I have been giving serious thought to retiring for some time. And now, thanks to you and your companions here, I am in a perfect position to do so."

All of a sudden I realized what had happened, more or less. "You

took the money!" I said, looking at the key he still held in his hand, the key he had just used to open my door.

Mr. Spencer smiled and nodded. "I did, indeed. And before you think me helpless in your midst . . ."

Crossing the room, he unscrewed the mouthpiece of the telephone and showed us a little gadget that definitely wasn't standard with Ma Bell.

"And there are others," he added to an almost apoplectic Hogan, "not only here but at the bank. Which is, by the way, how I learned about your embezzlement, Mr. Hogan, and the upcoming audit and all the rest. All the evidence is, of course, on tape in a safe place."

Turning to me, Mr. Spencer smiled again and handed me a bulky envelope he had taken from his jacket. He gave similar envelopes to Phil and Hank. "A few thousand to compensate each of you for all the trouble Mr. Hogan has put you to," he said. "I haven't counted it precisely, but it should be enough to tide you over."

"I'll get you for this!" Hogan hissed, his face red, his teeth gritting.

"I don't think so, Mr. Hogan," Mr. Spencer said. "However, there is something that you *will* get from now on. You will get Martha's mortgage payments. She will not make them, you understand, but you will receive them."

"That's blackmail!" Hogan said, outraged anew.

Mr. Spencer smiled quietly. "Yes, it is, isn't it?"

He was still smiling as he turned and opened the door. I remembered the crowd around the dining room table the night before, and I half expected to hear applause as he stepped out into the hall. ●

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MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

What kind of dog did Bulldog Drummond have as a pet, and what was its name?

A black cocker spaniel named Bess.

??

Her grandson would never learn not to butt into her affairs. He'd just have to learn the hard way!

Needlepoint

by R. TUTTLE

GRANNY GREEN WAS EIGHTY-SIX, WALKED WITH A CANE AND was a familiar sight in the tiny hamlet of Cooperville, Ohio, either sitting on the front porch of her picturesue dollhouse like cottage or poking around the flower filled front yard. A wiry little old lady, she seemed to be meeting the relentless attack of old age better than most. Her vitals were quite usable and her blood pressure, normally the unseen killer of the old, was a mere 120 over 78.

A former nurse, she was determined to live a full and independent life and she loved to read old medical journals, detective stories and sexy novels. The R rated movies on TV were her favorites. She would sit in front of the TV, her nimble fingers doing needlepoint, and occasionally taking a sip of tea laced with brandy, her favorite drink. She kept her white hair ear length but had long ago given up the wrinkle creams and lotions. Age had creased her fine featured face unmercifully, a fact she accepted — it was all part of life's mysterious game.

In general, the neighbors helped her with shopping and chores she couldn't handle, but they respected her fierce independence and

desire for privacy, and observed from afar. But there was this snoopy grandson in California who, through the latter years of her life, had kept insisting that she have a companion. When she turned eighty, he made arrangements to have a middleaged woman named Amy stay with her. Amy was big, tended to talk in a loud voice and had made Granny's life miserable with her vegetable diet and sterile TV habits — nothing but church services and educational programs! Brandy in tea was out of the question! The only activities left to Granny were her needlepoint and boring TV.

But Amy was a heavy smoker and within a month had died of respiratory problems — lack of oxygen.

Then, when Granny was eighty-four, the snoopy grandson had sent Mary, a tall, spare-woman of fifty-five who had immediately decided that Granny was old and feeble so she had taken away practically everything except the needlepoint. She was a heavy smoker too and a month later, she was found dead.

Respiratory problems again.

THE GRANDSON HAD APPARENTLY GIVEN UP AT THAT POINT and Granny lived the full life until a few months after her eighty-sixth birthday, which she had celebrated with brandied tea and a cupcake. Just before Christmas of that year, the grandson lowered the boom again by sending one Annie Wexler to live with Granny.

Annie was a plain looking, bosomless woman of forty, a librarian in the next town and a female Hitler of sorts. Sterile and clean were her favorite words, which applied not only to material things but also the mind.

It was raining outside when Annie arrived and Granny had just whipped up her special tea and was about to bite into a fresh doughnut when the tall, dour faced woman in black walked into the pleasantly untidy living room.

Annie stood in the center of the room next to her suitcase for one disapproving moment. Finally she spoke in clipped tones. "I smell whiskey."

"Brandy," corrected Granny. "I try to give my tea a little life."

Annie pointed a finger at her. "That will stop immediately. Liquor is the curse of our civilization." she pursed her lips and shook her head slowly. "At your age especially — drinking — and is that a doughnut?"

Granny took a quick bite. "Yes — what's wrong with it?"

"I'm sorry — doughnuts are out of the question." She took the doughnut from Granny's hand and picked up the tea cup. Then, she went into the kitchen and dumped the tea into the sink and dropped the doughnut into the garbage can. She walked back into the living room and regarded Granny through narrowed eyes. "From, now on things around here will be different."

Granny suddenly recalled many years ago when she had taken her five-year-old grandson to the zoo.

She should have fed him to the lions!

LIFE BECAME DOWNRIGHT MISERABLE FROM THAT POINT ON.
Annie also hated TV — the opium of the mind, she called it. So Granny's mystery programs, wrestling matches, roller derbies, baseball and football games — all were suddenly curtailed. Her meals were reduced to vegetable mush, milk which she hated, thin soups, no sweets — it was a frustrating time and she did a lot of needlepoint. At least Annie the terrible hadn't taken that away from her.

Granny had always taken a walk around the block by herself, stopping at the small store to buy a few odds and ends and dropping into the liquor store once a week for a bottle of brandy. That activity came to a grinding halt. Oh — she could go for a walk but Annie had to go with her — so she wouldn't fall. Which was a crock as far as Granny was concerned. She could walk as well as anybody! She quickly solved that problem by taking her walk in the morning while Annie was making life miserable for the employees of the library. She even managed a hamburger at a local fast-food place once in a while.

SO IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR GRANNY TO ADJUST HER LIFE SO that she could have her tea and brandy, eat a doughnut now and then, watch TV — she did all this while Annie was gone, usually in the morning. Then, an hour before Annie was expected back, she'd get rid of the evidence. Still, life wasn't much fun — she didn't have her independence — her life was locked into Annie's. The house was so clean that it was practically unlivable.

While Annie was home Granny concentrated on her needlepoint, sometimes making up intricate, mysterious designs as she went along, designs that seemed to have hidden meanings.

Annie inspected her needlepoint occasionally.

"Don't make sense," she snapped. "Don't mess up the floor with that thread!"

Annie didn't seem to have any bad habits. She came home at three in the afternoon, had a glass of milk, read her library digest for awhile, then prepared a bland, colorless supper. Every other day, she would lecture Granny — generally some dull subject that had no bearing on Granny's life. After putting Granny to bed at seven promptly, she would play a hand or two of solitaire, read some more and go to bed.

One Tuesday morning, two weeks after Annie had arrived, Granny was really frustrated. This Annie woman had no bad habits! No vices. She didn't smoke or drink — horse around with men — nothing! As Granny sat in the kitchen sipping her fortified tea and munching on a sugar cookie — she had a dozen hidden in her room — she decided to do a little investigating. At this point, Granny was not above snooping about in Annie's bedroom.

Accordingly, she locked the front door — just in case — and went into Annie's bedroom. The bed was neatly made and the dresser top was empty except for a trim little electric clock set precisely in the center. The small dressing table was clear — spotless and the mirror gleamed. The clothes in the closet were arranged according to size and colors.

This woman was the original Miss Clean!

She looked through the dresser drawers carefully. It wouldn't pay to make Annie suspicious. She might make her go to a shrink. The top drawer contained the usual array of neatly folded underthings — bloomers yet! — and long silk stockings. The second contained more of the same plus some plain white blouses.

There was a cigar box in one corner of the drawer.

She opened the box and saw about ten or twelve brown wrapped cigarettes. She picked one up and sniffed it.

Pot!

Annie was a pothead!

How about that? Granny's eyes sparkled. She had tried pot a few times but found it only made her sleepy. Happy at finally finding a weak spot in Annie's moral fiber, she closed the box, smoothed out all evidence of entry into the drawer and went back into the kitchen where she had a double brandy and tea.

Then, she gathered up her needlepoint gear and went out to the front room to her rocker in front of the window that looked out on the street. It was raining slightly and a foreboding dark sky hovered over Cooperville.

She picked up her needle, threaded it and began.

FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS, LIFE FOR GRANNY WENT ON AS usual. Annie continued to harass Granny with her nonsense about diet, drinking, and TV watching. There was an added threat about removing the TV.

Granny listened quietly and worked on her needlepoint.

On the following Saturday, Annie had an all day conference in Columbus so she left early in the morning. Granny was up at seven and had a delicious breakfast of fried potatoes and scrambled eggs washed down with one to one brandy and tea. Then, after washing the dishes, she checked Annie's cigar box. All the cigarettes were still there. After dressing warmly, she took her usual walk and picked up a half pound of hamburger and a quart of brandy.

ANNIE ARRIVED BACK AT THE COTTAGE AT ELEVEN THAT night, tired and nervous as well as somewhat frustrated. There was this attractive, middle-aged man who had talked her into drinking a whiskey and soda. At first the liquor had burned her throat; then a pleasant feeling of carefree relaxation had spread throughout her body. After she had finished the drink, the man had excused himself—and that was the last she had seen him. Besides this frustration, the meeting had been boring — same old stuff over and over again. The bus ride had been a horrible experience.

She sighed and looked into Granny's room. The old goat was fast asleep. She shut the door and went into the kitchen. A cup of hot tea would do her good. Her eyes fell upon a half filled bottle of brandy on the shelf. The old crone had been drinking again! She reached for the bottle, took the top off and was about to pour it down the drain when she paused. Perhaps a touch of this would do her some good. She poured some of the brandy into a glass and after taking a deep breath, downed it in one gulp.

It almost gagged her but oddly enough, the after effects were interesting. As with the whiskey, her taut nerves began to relax and the frustrations of the day began to evaporate. Perhaps Granny had something here. Still, Granny was much too old for this sort of thing.

She poured the rest of the brandy into the glass and went out into the front room. After staring out into the chilly night for a moment, she went into the bedroom and got two cigarettes out of the cigar box.

She loosened her blouse and sat down in front of the small fireplace. Then, she lighted one of the cigarettes, took a long, satisfying puff and followed it with a sip of brandy. Another puff followed by a sip — the

cruel, unfeeling world slowly gave way to an Eden where she was Queen — puff — sip —.

The next morning, Granny found her stretched out on the floor in front of the fireplace next to two cigarette butts and an empty glass.

She was dead.

Respiratory problems again.

"Granny," the doctor told her, "Everybody who comes to live with you seems to have bad lungs."

AND GRANNY WAS ALONE AGAIN. BUT NOT FOR LONG. A month later, the miserable grandson had made arrangements for another companion, this time a man, a cousin dredged up from the innards of Chicago. He was about fifty, a complete stranger to Granny, short, chubby and crabby as a pregnant black widow spider. He had a heart condition but still smoked two foul smelling cigars a day, one at noon and the other at supper. He also liked to drink and he managed to keep Granny's brandy bottle empty. On top of all that he called her "ole lady." On the other hand, he didn't try to run her life — in fact, he couldn't care less what she did as long as there was brandy in the bottle and food on the table.

On Saturday nights he usually went to the local bar for an evening of cards and liquor. It was snowing on this particular Saturday night, a wet snow, and it was cold. He finished up her brandy in one gulp and left.

Granny waited for fifteen minutes, then went into his bedroom, found the box of cigars and went back into the front room.

Granny then selected a long needle from her needlework box, carefully threaded it with her special fluorocarbon coated thread and then pushed the needle through the length of each cigar several times cutting the thread after each pass. The job took about forty-five minutes and the deadly thread was well hidden.

Fluorocarbons when heated strongly, gave off poisonous gases that played havoc with the lungs. Granny remembered that from her nursing days.

If everything went right, she would be alone again soon.

She returned the cigars to the box and went to bed.

Maybe that fool grandson would get the message someday!

There was nothing phony about these movies — the men weren't actors — and the death was permanent!

Thrills, inc.

by WILLIAM BITNER

THE ELEGANT YOUNG MAN — TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO HE would have been termed a fop — snuffed once, a petulant, almost effeminate sound, and set his glass down on the table.

"I've had enough of this small talk, really," he said. "Come, Phillip, you said you had something important to discuss with me. I'm sure you enjoy my company no more than I do yours, so please come to the point."

"Of course, Tommy," Phillip said, "by all means. I realize that you are an actor, an . . . artist, whereas I am — or rather was, but we won't dwell on that — simply a director. A craftsman. I only wanted to make sure you were comfortable. Is your drink all right?"

"It's fine, thank you," Tommy replied. Phillip must be quite desperate if he's turning to me, Tommy thought. He grinned, a nasty sight. "You're being rather servile this evening, Phillip," he observed. What is it that you want? If it's about money . . ."

"Oh, indeed it is," Phillip said, and his dark eyes gleamed, "but let me assure you, I'm doing fine. I have a great deal of money. Actually, I was simply wondering if you'd be interested in helping me to make a great deal more."

"A business venture, you mean?"

"Something of the sort, yes."

Tommy snorted. "I don't really think so. Besides, I have people who do all of my investing for me."

"As you wish," Phillip said. "More's your loss."

"I'm sure," Tommy said. "Still," he added, for there was no harm in getting Phillip's hopes up before crushing them, "For the sake of argument, how much would this great deal of money come to?"

"I can't say for certain. At least five million dollars, although it could go as high as eight or nine."

"Five million dollars? Oh, really . . ."

"Tax-free," Phillip added.

"Tax-free? You mean it's to be made illegally? Phillip, I'm not so

sure . . . five million dollars. *Five million?* I can't believe that."

"Tommy, let me impress it upon you that everything I tell you tonight is the truth. If you're not prepared to trust me and believe the things I tell you, starting with the sums I've named — and much of it is far more incredible than that — then I have nothing more to say to you."

Phillip sounded sincere and self-assured; decidedly nondesperate. They sat in silence for a few moments.

"You'll be leaving, then?" Phillip asked.

"No," Tommy said grudgingly, "no, I want to hear more. This may be some sort of pointless joke — not that I think it is," he added hastily, catching Phillip's expression, "but I can still hear you out. The prospect of making five million dollars —"

"At least."

"— at least, makes one's belief a flexible thing."

"Just so," Phillip agreed. "Of course, what I tell you is in the strictest confidence, but then obviously if I felt there was a chance of you passing it on to anyone else you wouldn't be here now. So, another drink before we begin? No?"

"Very well, then. You might remember a number of years back, right in the midst of that rash of movies and books about them, sharks were very much in vogue. Yes? Well, a promoter set up a live bout between a man and a shark to be broadcast over closed circuit television. He was in line to make a very heavy profit."

"I remember it vaguely, yes," Tommy said, "but that fight was never held, I thought."

"No, you're right, it wasn't. The ASPCA or some such organization prevented it, I believe. However, they were never informed about the one we held."

It took a moment for this to sink in before Tommy blurted, "You held! You —"

"Exactly. My colleagues and I, waggishly dubbed 'Thrills Inc.' by one of our customers. Our original plan had been to use a killer whale, but we couldn't find anyone willing to go against one. What we finally settled for was a Great White, the largest one we could locate. As I recall, it was estimated at a few inches over fourteen feet."

"As I recall, the filming was done off of Dangerous Reef — prosaically named, no? — which lies off the south coast of Australia. We were forced to wait there for three weeks before our seal oil baits drew in a shark of the proper species and of sufficient size."

"When it appeared we ringed it with nets so that it couldn't escape and then our diver — he liked to be referred to as an undersea gladiator," he added dryly, "went in, armed with a seven foot tri-bladed spear."

PHILLIP PAUSED, TOOK A SIP FROM HIS DRINK.

"So what happened?" Tommy asked. "Who won?"

"Don't be ridiculous," Phillip said. "One doesn't kill a fourteen-foot shark with a hand-held spear. I doubt if even Tarzan would be equal to that. At first we were worried, afraid all of our work and expense would go for nothing. The fish ignored him. Our man, this gladiator if you will, pursued it around the enclosure jabbing at it with his spear for over ten minutes, until at last I presume it became annoyed.

"Then it tore off his arm, tore off his leg, and swallowed most of the rest of him. All on film."

"You're kidding," Tommy said, but it was an exclamation of wonder, not doubt.

"With that opening act out of the way we got down to the main event, brought along unbeknownst to our hapless gladiator. A killer team, three former US Navy frogmen, armed with guns firing grenade-tipped spears. Using hindsight it's easy to see that using three men was something of a mistake. They all had to be extremely careful not to hit one another, since even a not-so-near miss with one of those things they were carrying would kill a man through concussion. While they were maneuvering for a clear shot the animal, now thoroughly aroused, was able to take one of them before the other two could catch it between them and blow holes in it a man could swim through. What was left of the shark and what was left of the man in its jaws went to the bottom together."

Tommy grimaced, which didn't go unnoticed.

"Gruesome, yes," Phillip agreed, "but also extremely profitable. In all, twelve prints of that first film were made and sold to those select few whose taste and discretion — and wealth — it was tailored to. That film went for \$100,000 each, but we command much higher prices these days."

"That film became, for a while, the prime diversion for that jaded group. Many, many private viewing parties were held, to be attended by only the elite's upper crust. Surely you don't mean to tell me that you've never attended one?"

"No," Tommy said, ignoring — or missing entirely — the slur. In spite of himself, Tommy was deeply intrigued. Something told him that this was no joke, no hoax. Phillip and his colleagues *were* making such films, and apparently reaping huge profits. The idea of being included in such endeavors, perhaps even being allowed to select the next subject for filming was very — stimulating.

"Tell me more," he said.

"Obviously," Phillip continued, "with such a good thing on our hands the only thing to do was to exploit it, in typical Hollywood fashion. Since that first film we've staged a number of duels: sword, axe, quarterstaff, revolver, sawed-off shotgun. We held a Roman boxing match, the boxers wearing cesti — wrapped and weighted fists, with metal spikes protruding." He smiled in reminiscence. "That was a good one.

"For fans of the Old West we re-enacted the gunfight at the O.K. Corral. Amusingly enough, in our version the Earp Brothers and Doc Holliday were the ones who ended up being gunned down, but then again, they *were* outnumbered.

"We've also continued with our man versus beast matches. We filmed a fight between one of our bestiaris armed with a machete and facing a jaguar, another fought a lion while being armed with an assegai, and a third wrestled a trained Doberman attack dog bare-handed. There have been no human survivors so far, although the one fellow did manage to strangle the dog before bleeding to death."

"Our latest film featured two third-level black belts, karate, pitted against a Sumatran man-eating tigress."

"Still haven't lost your flair for overdoing things, have you Phillip," Tommy smirked. "A tiger maybe, some poor maddened brute that you'd starved and mistreated, but an actual man-eater? There aren't any man-eating tigers in this day and age."

"On the contrary," Phillip said, "there are many man-eaters left about. Quite a lot of things go on in out of the way corners of the world — and some not so out of the way — that most persons never hear of. This particular tigress had killed and eaten twenty-six humans before being captured for our shows. Twenty-eight, her score now stands.

"But we have a problem, Tommy, I won't try to hide it from you. Our clients are getting bored. *Bored*. Can you believe that? This classic material, these elemental conflicts between man and man, man and beast, not to mention massive doses of violence and gore and don't you

think for a minute that that's not what draws them in, and still it's that same old ennui cropping up again. But I think I've come up with a solution, and that's where I need your help."

"I WAS WONDERING WHERE I FIT INTO ALL OF THIS," TOMMY said. "With my obvious contacts among this elite, as you term them, I'm to recruit you a new set of clients, I presume?"

"No, Tommy, that's not it at all. think man. *Think*. What is it that makes your film-goer, average or elite, decide to view a certain film? Aside from the sex, aside from the violence, what is it that makes one film a runaway at the box office while an equally violent and explicit film just across the street plays to an empty house?"

"It's the *actor*, Tommy, you of all persons should agree with that. The face and the name, that's the draw. Look at Bronson, look at Eastwood or Reynolds, at some of the god-awful films they've made that have taken in money hand over fist because to the audience these men are appealing."

"Likewise with the hero there is also the great villain, the ones the audience come to see get their just due. The man they love to hate. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

"What we need for *our* films is that familiar face, that drawing card. Someone, in the case of a movie like this, that the audience doesn't care very much for at all. Obviously, Tommy, I mean someone like you."

TOMMY TRIED TO RISE, TO RUN, BUT BEFORE THOUGHT could become motion his chair tilted, pivoted, slammed backward. The floor opened and Tommy was pitched headlong down a coal-dark chute, to be dumped in a heap at its bottom.

Hesitantly, he opened his eyes. He was in a cell of some sort, ceramic tile walls, floor and ceiling. The room was divided in half by a transparent plexiglass wall, and behind it Tommy could see the great shaggy beast which paced and paced.

The clear divider began to slide slowly back, as Phillip's voice came from the speaker in the ceiling.

"There's a knife hanging on the wall behind you, Tommy," it said. "I suggest you use it — that wolf's been starved for quite some time now. It may be rabid as well, I'm told. So, give us a good show, and remember — this one's a take."

If only he had killed the child, he thought, he would have been safe. But that was impossible: he could not slay a little boy!

A Slice Of History

by GREG COX

MOST OF MARY JANE KELLEY STILL RESTED ON HER BED, THE very same bed wherein she had so often earned her meager living. The thin, ragged sheets — once grey and dingy — were now colored by brilliant splattered redness. Nearby, a short, bearded man arranged the rest of Mary's body, or portions thereof, on the bedside table. Her most intimate organs he had wrapped in several layers of old newsprint, the better to carry them home with him. Souvenirs they were, of a particularly memorable experience.

The date: November 9, 1888.

The place: 26 Dorset Street, Spitalfields, in the East End of London.

The Ripper calmly stroked the scarlet whiskers of his beard, as red as the blood on sheets, whore, and knife. He was very pleased; never before had he taken a victim in the privacy of her own lodgings. He liked the results. There was more time to do a thorough job. No witnesses. No danger of exposure.

A muffled, choking sob shattered his composure.

The Ripper turned and saw two small eyes peering at him through the crack of a not-quite-closed closet. "Lord preserve me!" exclaimed the frightened murderer. What devil-spy was this?

A child emerged from the closet. A boy, pale and dirty. "Momma?" he called plaintively, moving timidly to the gore-splattered bed. His small blue eyes found the fleshy trophies on the bedstand, the grisly remnants of the Ripper's work. The child screamed.

The Ripper fled.

"Damn!" he cursed as he ran down the streets of Spitalfields, his special package beneath his arm. He had been seen!

If only he had killed the child, he thought, he would have been safe. But that was impossible: he could not slay a little boy! No, not ever. It was only the daughters, the impure daughters of Eve, that were his rightful prey.

Like that Kelley woman. And all the others.

He hurried west along the Thames, being careful to avoid Whitechapel. There were too many coppers in that region these days. "And all because of me," the Ripper murmured. The others, they had all been in Whitechapel.

Emma Smith. Mary Nichols. Annie Chapman. Elizabeth Strade. Catherine Eddowes. And that girl by the Grove-Yard Buildings.

Their names, their faces, followed him out of the East End.

Why — in Heaven's name! — was Scotland Yard so up in arms about such trash?

The Ripper didn't understand, but he recognized the reality of the circumstances. For whatever reason, half the police of London were now looking for him. The law was out for his blood.

And now they had a witness. God save him from the tongue of that damnable child!

ONCE AGAIN, THE RIPPER FINGERED HIS SCARLET WHISKERS. The whoreson brat had seen him, would give the police his description. "A red beard," he heard that childish voice cry out. "Get the man with the bushy, red beard!"

The Ripper raced through Cheapside, past St. Paul's. He could not travel fast enough. Even now, he feared, the hounds of the law were on his trail.

"God preserve me!" he whispered. He cursed the lush, red foliage on his face. It was a beacon now, the Mark of Cain, calling out to the vengeful Justice he had so long eluded.

Would he never finish his great crusade? He had vowed to rid England of twenty harlots; there were thirteen more to go!

"God, save me," he begged. He loped down Ludgate Street, then across Blackfriar's Road. Salvation appeared before his eyes.

"Thank you, O' Lord!" the Ripper said. There before him was a fine-looking barber shop, its door still open to the night air.

The Ripper ran forward eagerly.

"Excuse me, barber," asked the killer, "are you still accepting customers at this late hour?"

"Ay, sir," said the barber, a tall man with a wide, pale face. "I

do my best work in the evenings. Fewer interruptions."

"Very good," said the Ripper. "I want a clean, thorough shave — immediately."

"Are you sure, sir?" the barber asked. "That's a lovely beard you have."

"Very sure," the Ripper answered, seating himself in the barber's chair. He allowed himself a sigh of relief. The beard would go. His identity would be concealed. He was safe.

Outside, the winds of November blew down Fleet Street, past the neat-looking establishment of Mr. Sweeney Todd, barber. ●

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Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

It is not often that a debut novel leads off this column, but we have to give the nod this month to Carolyn Wheat's *Dead Man's Thoughts*. The author writes about a public defender in Brooklyn, which is her own profession. She has obviously drawn on her own years of experience in shaping her story that in places may well be autobiographical, but she has done an excellent job of bringing alive the career of a public defender in a great, congested city. The authenticity of her background fills every page, her people are completely believable, and her story is a good one. When another public defender is killed, his girl friend sets out to solve the case while she carries on with her own work load. There are pages that aren't pretty in this book, but it is a mystery that rises close to literature. Miss Wheat, don't stop now! (St. Martin's, \$14.95)



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Two fine treats for mystery lovers have just come from the Southern Illinois University Press. *Bullet for Unwelcome Guests* is an attractive volume of the best short mystery stories of Christianna Brand, a lady unsurpassed in devising some of the trickiest endings in the literature. Agatha Christie once told Miss Brand she was her logical successor; this book will show you why. A pure delight. The second volume, *Exeunt Murderers*, offers the best mystery stories by the memorable Anthony Boucher, whose permanent reputation is secure. These two exceptional books lead us to hope that there will be more to come. (Southern Illinois University Press, Box 3697, Carbondale, Illinois. \$16.95 each.)

☆ ☆ ☆

Michael L. Cook, the indefatigable mystery scholar, has done it again. This time he offers *Mystery Fanfare*, a composite annotated index to all of the mystery and mystery-related fanzines. Not too many people will have the comprehensive files necessary to make full use of this impressive large-format volume, but it contains a wealth of information otherwise virtually unavailable. Mr. Cook is the author of the invaluable *Monthly Murders*; this new volume, reproduced from typescript, is definitive. (Popular Culture Press, Bowling Green, Ohio \$21.95 in cloth, \$12.95 in paper.)

☆ ☆ ☆

Another first novel worthy of notice is Will Harriss' *The Bay Psalm Book Murder*. This is all about a copy of a famous rare book: the first volume published in America. There is some question of its authenticity, but this is overshadowed by the murder of the librarian to whom it was entrusted. The detectives are a retired college professor and a young woman proof reader. A unique feature of the book is the reproduction of a page from the rare book in two different versions. Unless such versions actually exist, how the author ever managed to produce such an authentic looking fake is in itself a mystery. Also we love the proofreader for the sign above her desk:

PROOFREADING AT IT'S FINEST.

If you don't get it at first, take your time. (Walker and Co., \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

An inviting new book is Simon Brett's *Murder in the Title* which features his actor detective, Charles Paris. It's all about a small

British repertoire theater that puts on a locally written thriller to deservedly limited applause and follows up with a new-wave play that calls for nude performers. If you read carefully you'll find that all the clues are given and discover a good entertainment in the bargain. Recommended. (Scribners, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

This month's espionage entry is *Blindfold* by Anthony Melville-Ross, whose own life story qualifies him to debut in this complex genre. An agent from the Special Branch is assigned to track down 240 containers of nerve gas stolen from the British Army. Much of the action takes place in the African desert. There is the usual mole, which is now an overdone device, and involved deception, but the skillful use of the background helps this book to stand out as a superior first effort. (Harper and Row. Price not given.)

☆ ☆ ☆

The Sound of Detection is a new work by Francis M. Nevins, Jr. and Ray Stanich, subtitled "Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio." It contains a discussion of the Queen radio programs, how some of them happened to be created and how they were used to aid the efforts of World War II. At the end of the book there is a valuable listing of all the broadcasts and when they took place. This is a specialist's item, but a very good one for Queen collectors and those interested in what is now known as old time radio. (Brownstone Books, 1711 Clifty Drive, Madison IN 47250. \$6.95 in wrappers)

☆ ☆ ☆

Robert Barnard offers his latest in *The Case of the Missing Bronte*. Perry Trethowan is back again, this time in pursuit of what may be a previously unknown manuscript by Emily Bronte. The author, a three-time Edgar nominee, has demonstrated his expertise many times before, sufficient to say that he is in good form here. (Scribners, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Another proven performer is Frank Parrish, whose Dan Mallett is unique in the literature. A poacher, thief, sometimes supposed handyman, con artist, and general all around renegade, Mallett is also a detective of sorts. In *Bait on the Hook* he is caught sleeping with the

local policeman's daughter by a persistent nine-year-old who blackmails him into taking her with him for a life of adventure. Disguising herself as a boy and renaming herself Cedric, she gives Dan a very hard time while he tries to solve a murder in order to clear himself of the charge. Any Dan Mallett book is a guarantee of good entertainment; this one adds to the author's growing reputation. (Dodd Mead, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Bones of Contention is the name of the new book by Edward Candy. Someone sends an unsolicited skeleton to a sleepy medical museum in London that is riddled by internal politics. There are some nice touches, such as looking for a lost object among the livers, but this cannot be rated as more than a routine entertainment in the genre. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

PAPERBACK NOTES: The prolific Michael Innes appears twice this month; *Lord Mullion's Secret* is offered by Penguin at \$2.95 while three Inspector John Appleby novels have been packaged in *The Michael Innes Omnibus* in a larger format at \$8.95 . . . Nazi hunting carries on in *The Asgard Solution* by James Marino. After Ira Levin's *The Boys From Brazil* this theme has been pretty well mined out despite a good effort here. Avon, \$3.50 . . . The supernatural killer turns up again in *Come Follow Me* by Philip Michaels. A centuries-old Pied Piper of Death is luring away children while he is pursued by a dedicated ex-cop. Avon, \$2.95 . . . *Wedding Guest* by David Wiltse is now in paperback. It's a good shocker, but presumes that the Shah of Iran is still alive. However, lots of action and violence certainly keep things moving at a fast clip. Dell, \$3.50 . . . For the ladies Avon offers the story of a spurned woman bent on revenge in *Dawn and Vengeance* by Julie Keitges. The background in part is the annual carnival in Rio. \$2.95 . . . *Finders Weepers* by Max Byrd features private eye Mike Haller, who reminds us strongly of Mike Hammer in more than name. There's a hooker, a fortune at stake, and lots of violence along the way. From Bantam at \$2.50 . . . Ernest Tidyman turns from fiction (he writes the Shaft stories) to tell us how a million and a half was successfully ripped off in Massachusetts and never recovered. The book is called *Big Bucks* and is now in paperback from Avon at \$2.95.

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